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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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The Glass Mountain

Sharon Lynn Sparling

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

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ABSTRACT

The Glass Mountain

Sharon Lynn Sparling

This novel is about the emotional development of a woman named Chloe Delaney. Although a talented pianist, through doubt and insecurity, she is unable to achieve any personal contentment.

The action covers twenty-eight years of her life, between the ages of ten and thirty-eight. Each of the seven chapters is concerned with a time of decision, and occurs in a twenty-four hour period.

Chloe's primary struggle is with her lack of identity. Adopted, and an only child, she had a sterile relationship with her parents. As a woman, she cannot sustain emotional commitments, and she cannot even love her own son unreservedly.

The book charts her progress in discovering and resolving the anguish of her soul.

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This iceberg cuts its facets from within
Like jewelery from a grave
It saves itself perpetually and adorns
Only itself.

Elizabeth Bishop
The Imaginary Iceberg

So lonely am I.
My body is a floating weed
Severed at the roots.
Were there water to entice me,
I would follow it, I think.

Ono No Komachi
Kokinshu

1

Chloe pressed the door shut. It was early. The nurse had roused her for breakfast at six, but she wasn't hungry. Dr. Homsy would undoubtedly have something to say about that. She never did eat breakfast, and disliked it that her personal habits were now the subject of scrutiny.

The solarium was empty. Stuffed vinyl chairs were still poised in animate clusters from the previous evening: cream chairs and blue chairs. She noticed a tear on the arm of one, where anxious fingers had compulsively plucked at the stuffing. The housekeeping staff had mopped the black and white checked linoleum, and sunlight rolled in the south-west windows with golden heaviness. Screened windows. Thick protective screens, she noted with a tightening of her lips. They were, after all, on the third floor. Chloe couldn't imagine any of the patients, drugged, dazed on diazepam or pipertil, taking the big step.

A shaft of sun touched her bold red dress, casting a diffusion of the colour, staining the floor and walls about her. An unapproved colour, red. Those endorsed as soothing were most shades of blue, one shade of insipid pink, a British manor-house dining-room green, and off-white ranging in tone from clotted cream to café au lait. A pale coat of enamel on the old upright piano was from that vapid spectrum. The day of her admittance, she had been told there was a piano, and after three weeks of

ploughing through a pizarre collection of nineteen-forties novels from the nurse's lounge; musty and spine crumbly, she felt ready to play.

Chloe crossed the shining tiles and sat on the bench. The lid pushed open with a clatter; the strings hummed. Many of the keys had been stripped of their ivory, and the exposed wood beneath was scratched and marked. She touched one. The wood was smoothed and darkened with absorbed body oil. Anonymous initials were carved on the surface, and a date. E.M. 1947. The year she was born. The marks stretched across thirty-eight years. I was here. I was. Sad, sad initials. Chloe dismissed them from her mind and ran a quick arpeggio. The instrument, if jangly, was in tune. Dust motes jumped in the vibration, sound waves expanding outwards, rebounding off the cream walls. She flexed her fingers and began playing, carefully and deliberately as a child might; a child's piece. What was it called? Her hands moved automatically. She recalled the cover of the sheet music, a picture of the boy Mozart seated at his spinet. The print inside was enlarged and the fingering, simplified. 'The Music Box'. The process of playing felt alien, like returning home after a long absence and finding it smaller than you had imagined, remembered. She ran through the piece again, stacatto, an octave higher, quasi senza pedale. It really did sound like a music box. Delight was there, intact and shining, as when her pudgy dimpled five-year-old fingers first mastered the repeated scales, running up and down the keys.

The air pressure in the room altered slightly as the door

opened and closed. Her illness (She chided herself that even in the stillness of her thoughts, she used the soft, protective euphemism.) — her breakdown, her crack-up. Good term, crack-up. I am everything I am cracked up to be. Her crack-up had 'sensitized her to subtle environmental changes'. Mental environ. She glanced over her shoulder. A woman in a flowered johnny shirt stared back. Jane, Jane, plain Jane, insane plain Jane who wandered the halls in search of, what? Perhaps an attractive nightgown. The hem of the hospital one didn't quite reach her knees. Her heavy white legs were mottled by bruises, spider and varicose veins. Another of Chloe's sensitivities—an acute sense of smell. From across the room, she knew the coffee in the cup was black. Turning back to the piano, she decided to try something different. Another golden oldie. 'Für Elise.' Da da, da da, da, da da, da da... Oversized slippers slapped the linoleum. A hand flashed past her left eye, depositing the coffee on the piano top. The liquid slopped over, dripping a streak of brown on the pale enamel. The woman sat beside her on the bench as she continued to play, trying to concentrate, keenly aware of the sweet, acrid odour issuing from Jane's white flesh. The woman's knees brushed hers. For all the attention she was giving to the playing, it could have been someone else pounding out the Beethoven. It could have been a piano roll. Her arms, stiff and tense, moved by habit, not feeling. All that she knew, was the moist warmth of the body beside her. Why didn't crazy Jane go away and drink her coffee elsewhere? Why didn't she jump out the window?

4.

"Pretty," the woman croaked. "I never took piano lessons. My sister did. I always wanted to, but they didn't let me. Did they let your sister take lessons too?"

Chloe smelled eggs. The old nuisance probably spilled yolk on her johnny shirt. Maybe that's why it had little flowers: stains wouldn't show. Save on laundry bills. But this was an exclusive loony-bin — sanitarium. Sebastian had seen to that, had looked after her interests when she had been in her little state of catatonia. It sounded like a vacation; an island off the coast of California.

She shifted to the right. So did crazy Jane.

"Teach me to play." Jane's heavy arm descended with a crash on the bass keys. Then the left. She was a lifer. Paranoid schizophrenia. A walking testament to thirty years of psychiatric experiments: electroshock therapy, L.S.D., and a small lobotomy. Not a whole lot of dura mater left, thought Chloe. Sebastian had left specific instructions that she was not to be fed so much as a valium.

Jane's hands, with their clenched fingers, bashed the piano. Smash, crash. The cup rattled, shook, and spilled more coffee down the front panel. Chloe blocked Jane out and continued the piece, but she couldn't hear. It was impossible. Her long fingers formed the correct patterns, pressing inaudibly into the keys as the pesky woman banged away at the bass.

"Come on. Give me a little lesson." Jane reached between Chloe's arms, her bloated hands smashing the notes, pushing her sticky warmth heavily over.

"Stop," Chloe screamed. "Stop." She froze with her hands raised over the keyboard. "For the love of God, stop." She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to will the woman away. Why was she permitted to wander around and bother people? Why wasn't she confined to her room? Chloe wished she had some chocolates. Maybe she could be bribed away. Bribed out of sight, out of hearing.

"I'm a good learner, but they never let me take lessons. I wanted to take lessons. I asked them. But they only gave my sister lessons." Jane yelled to be heard over the noise.

"Stop that! Stop what you're doing! Stop. Stop." The coffee cup was doing a little dance along the edge of the lid. Jane now banges all the black notes, hand over hand. Chloe's head was bursting, spinning, cracking.

"You can teach me all those pretty songs. I can play for my sister. Then she'll take me home. They were all wrong."

"For Christ's sake, stop that noise! I can't stand it!" Chloe stood abruptly, jerking up one end of the bench and dumping the fat woman on the floor. Jane stared uncomprehendingly from her prone position, the pathetic blotchy limbs splayed across the checked tiles.

"You offensive old cow!" Chloe kicked the side of the piano and the coffee cup finally tipped over the edge of the lid bounced off the keys. Brown liquid spattered everywhere. Jane shrieked and tried to roll away, tried to jam herself under a chair. An unreality descended on Chloe. Jane, floundering on the floor reminded her of an amoeba, struggling, threatening

to change shape, to divide and become two Janes, four Janes, eight Janes; all emitting sharp piercing cries. She turned and drifted out of the room, down the corridor. Janes screams grew fainter and Chloe ignored the nurses who brushed past her in their race to investigate the commotion. 'What do I care?' she thought. 'This has nothing to do with me.'

2

It was hot. Stinking-bodies-in-the-bus-station hot. Stench-from-the-sewers hot. People-on-the-street-passing-in-slow-motion hot. And the insects: grasshoppers bolting out of nowhere, lighting on any scruffy patch of grass wedged between concrete and asphalt, zinging into the sides of buildings, splatting against windows, crunching underfoot. Zing, splat, crunch. Zing, splat, crunch. Two girls in pedal-pushers knelt on the sidewalk, trapping them in jars with ping-pong paddles. A long red convertible cruised by blaring the Everly Brothers. The teenagers in the back seat waved like royalty.

Chloe, balancing on the edge of the curb, watched some children, perhaps her own age, pull a big red setter into a cascade of water flooding from an open hydrant. The street shimmered, shivered, waved, fractured, divided into two distinct parts, separated by a river of light. The sun glared off a hundred windshields, bumpers, storefronts. Her head ached. New York, after ten hours in an oven of a bus. It was hot, she was hot, and that water... the kids, in bathing suits, in underwear, splashed each other. She gripped her little plastic purse and walked into the flash of water. The children laughed and pointed. The dog broke loose and rushed past her toward the dry sidewalk. She sat down on the street and turned

her face into the spray. It felt good.

But wouldn't she look a wreck to meet her grandmother?

Chloe's father had always said his mother was dead, and she'd never had reason to doubt him. But then she'd found the letters back at the house in Montreal: a thick stack buried in a desk drawer under family documents. All on the same stationary, bearing the same return address, written by the same hand. Some were addressed to her father: David Delaney, scratched out in fluid copperplate lettering, but the more recent ones were to Chloe Delaney. She had opened these first, crouched on the thick broadloom, listening for the car in the driveway. There were cards: Christmas cards, birthday cards, Easter cards, and crisp green American currency slid to her lap. Tens and fives and twenties. He had said she was dead. Chloe, angered, slit the envelopes sent to him. 'How is the child? What is she like? Is she happy? Why don't you write? Please send a photograph? How is she doing at school? What are her interests? Please write...' So she had folded up the money, pretended all was normal, and crept from her bed that night to catch a bus. To meet her grandmother. To sit in the middle of a street under an open hydrant.

Someone poked her shoulder. She started.

"Hey, you okay?" Beads of water clung to his kinky hair like diamonds, and his teeth and eyes sprang from the blackness of his face. Chloe stared, transfixed. She had never seen a real live Negro up close.

"Thank you. I'm fine." The water ran down her body as he helped her to her feet: down the thick braids, the clinging white dress, the pale legs. Her footprints evaporated, even as she walked, the sneakers squelching pleasantly. She fanned her skirt. Within minutes it was dry. At the nearest intersection, she held out the hand with the plastic purse and summoned a cab. They were everywhere: blinding yellow, like the day. But no. The day was white. White and airless. She opened her purse and gave the driver one of the envelope flaps. Breeze from the window tickled the small hairs on her cheek. The black vinyl burned her back. In a few minutes she'd meet her grandmother, whom she had journeyed to New York to find. She was too tired to feel anything at all.

"So are you planning on sleeping here or are you getting out?" The driver snapped his fingers before Chloe's eyes as she stared through the cab window at the three storey redstone, one of an endless row of three storey redstones on the curving, tree lined street. The one that concerned her had windowboxes of vivid geraniums, immaculate steps, a gleaming brass hand-rail, doorknob and knocker. She made the pretence of rummaging in her purse. The wad of bills was stuffed in a zippered compartment. She peeled off a five and handed it to the cabbie.

"Keep the change." She felt very grown up. He tipped his cap and screeched away from the curb.

The windows on the house were so clean you could hardly

see them at all. The tree in the middle of the sidewalk looked limp. All the trees looked limp, but the plants in the flowerboxes, tended, watered, stood erect. Her stomach fluttered. She smiled at a lady pushing a baby carriage. The handrail scorched her skin. She let go and climbed the steps unaided. Her nose caught a whiff of the musty, pungent scent of geraniums, still dripping from a recent watering. The bell echoed hollowly from deep inside the house. Sweat trickled between her shoulderblades. There was movement within. A grasshopper flew against the door as it opened.

"Is it that time again? We really don't go in for Girl Guide cookies around here, but..." The tall man reached into his pocket and handed over some bills. "... take this with my best wishes, and do whatever it is you do with it. What do you do with it? Buy more cookies? Anyway, you have an interesting face. You should take drama lessons instead of wasting your time with boring sororal organizations." He smiled. The only thing covering his lean, tanned body was a pair of bathing trunks. Suddenly, he sprang onto the porch and stretched over the railing, breaking off a red blossom, which he then slid through Chloe's braid. "Literature, drama... where did you get that face? Lola Montez? Marguerite Gautier? Not pretty, but... I have seen that face before." Before she could respond, the door had closed and she was alone on the porch.

Chloe looked at the bills in her hand. Six dollars. The sun beat on her head, her shadow retreating to a smudge

at her feet. Who was he? She had heard her father say that his mother used 'to drag them in off the street'. Maybe this was one of 'them'. She sat on the top step and pressed the money beside a folded paper in her purse --the document she had been seeking when she found the letters. She rubbed the glossy red seal. An insect landed on her hand. She shook it off. The limp, limp leaves were riddled with holes, hanging half dead in the still air. She didn't know who the man was, but the last letter from grandmother was dated only a month ago. Her grandmother was just inside this house, she thought, and she jumped up and crashed the heavy knocker three times. The response was quicker this time, and the door swung open before she had time to worry. He stared down at her with amused grey-blue eyes, and was about to say something when she spoke. The words came out in a breathless rush.

"Does Mrs. Delaney live here?" The metal rim of her purse dug into her palm and the geranium tickled her neck. What if he was grandmother's 'paramour'. She liked the sound of the word. Paramour. It rolled around her head like a gentle insult. At least she was a relative. The thought made her bold. The man answered "Yes..." and was about to continue, but Chloe wouldn't let him.

"Then tell her, please, that her granddaughter is here, and would like to see her."

Chloe dashed under his arm into the dark coolness of the hall where she sank onto a padded stool, leaned against the wood panelling, and watched. The man closed the door and

approached her. She shrank into herself as he squatted to stare at her face.

"Of course. Then you must be Chloe. I'm Cosimo." He extended his hand. The hair on his chest was golden. She ignored the gesture.

"Cosimo who?"

He roared, rocking back on his heels. "Cosimo Delaney, your cousin. Didn't you know you had a cousin?"

Chloe shook her head. She had only skimmed the letters. There might have been a mention of a Cosimo. She hadn't noticed. He ran a finger from her temple, down the side of her cheek, along her jaw, then wagged a braid and stood, pulling her to her feet. The hair on his legs was golden too, but the mop on his head was sandy brown. The same as her father's, only her father had a crew cut, and Cosimo's big soft curls reminded her of pictures she'd seen, taken in the olden days. Artists.

"Come on. Gran's finishing lunch."

He led her back through the hall, down a flight of stairs to a wonderfully cool basement kitchen where a gypsy, with her feet in a tub of ice water sat, drinking tea. No. Not a gypsy. Gypsies didn't wear saris. Did they? One arm and shoulder were bare, and the skirt was hiked up to the thighs. An end of the fabric dangled in the water, and the moisture was seeping upward. Her long black hair hung loose, brushing the tile floor. The woman turned her head and stared with a disconnected gaze. Her skin was the white of ivory,

and the brown eyes were seeing something else entirely, not Chloe. She was old. The flesh of the bare arm sagged and trembled as she reached for a jar on the table. There was a spoon sticking out of it. Cosimo opened the fridge door and hauled out a bag of ice. He carried it over to the woman and dumped half in the tub. Water slopped onto the floor and she, giving no indication of any awareness, spooned the contents of the jar into her mouth. Black stuff.

Cosimo returned the ice-bag to the freezer, refilled the old woman's cup, then bade Chloe sit on a stool beside the table. Little silver elephants dotted the red silk. So this was grandmother. Or what was left of her. The spoon travelled from jar to mouth, jar to mouth. She put it down to drink some steaming tea. The feet wiggled. More water splashed on the floor.

Cosimo, who had been fussing at a far counter, returned with a peanut butter sandwich and a coke. The straws slid up to the lip of the bottle to hang at a low angle above the table-top. Chloe bit into the sandwich and looked out the door that led onto a small garden. A brick wall surrounded an area not much bigger than two rooms. A wide double spiral of spray, silver in the mid-day light, beaded the plants, but even so, the flowers, the shrubs, the fruit tree, nodded limply. An occasional grasshopper hurled itself onto the screen.

"So Biblical. A plague of grasshoppers. Have we been very naughty?" Cosimo flicked at the mesh and cleared it.

Within moments, there were others. A chair creaked. Grandmother slapped her knee.

"Not naughty. Wasteful. For instance, many cultures consider grasshoppers a valuable addition to their diets. Even a delicacy. So many nutrients. And they fatten themselves up. We require cows." There was nothing old about the voice. "Who are you?"

"I'm Chloe."

"Oh." The old brown eyes widened slightly. Chloe unzipped the pocket of her purse and withdrew the roll of bills.

"I found your letters and cards yesterday. Daddy had them hidden at the back of a drawer in the desk. They weren't opened."

Grandmother looked up from the money to Chloe's face.

"David never opened them?"

"And he never gave me mine."

"I wonder why he didn't throw them out. Has he ever spoken of me?"

Not when he thought she could hear. "Some.. He told me you were dead. Anyway, this is all the money, except for what I spent on the bus and taxi. And some food."

"Where are your parents? Do they know you're here?"

"I ran away. From home."

Grandmother and Cosimo exchanged glances.

"By yourself? How did you get past the border?"

"I wrote a note saying I was being met in New York."

"I see."

They stared at each other as Chloe picked up the coke bottle and pushed the straws down. She took a long sip, not blinking. Her grandmother didn't blink either. After a minute the old woman grinned and took up the jar and spoon. Chloe noticed that the screen was again dotted with insects. The coke tasted good. She hadn't eaten since supper last night.

"So... are you moving in here?"

Chloe nodded and finished the first half of the sandwich. "For the time being, if you don't mind." Was that polite enough? "Please." Did it matter? She wanted to stay with her grandmother, and this cousin she had decided to like. Yes, may I stay here, please. I am not wanted anywhere else. Those questioning brown eyes were upon her again. Please, please. This is a big house and I wouldn't eat much. You'd hardly know I was here. Why can't I tell you this? Why can't I speak? You wanted my pictures. You sent cards. Please want me. They don't. They never did. They should have left me in an orphanage. I have never been hugged.

Flick. Cosimo watched as the grasshoppers were pitched back into the garden, onto the dripping ground cover, the glistening brick path. The air smelled like ironing. Cosimo was a hugger. She could tell. The plastic purse still hung from her wrist. She could feel the weight of the papers inside, papers that proved she didn't belong with her parents. Grandmother pushed the mass of hair over one shoulder and

rubbed an ice cube from the tub on her neck. Finally, she spoke.

"If this is to be a prolonged stay, I assume you have portmanteaux?"

"Pardon?"

"Luggage, suitcases, a densely packed bandana, tied to a stick," elaborated Cosimo.

Chloe shook her head. "I didn't want to take anything of theirs. Not even this." She pulled at the thin cotton skirt, then let it drop, as though the fabric was somehow tainted. Grandmother smiled. Her teeth were lovely and even.

"The child has a distinct flair for the dramatic."

"I thought so. Not surprising. Considering." Cosimo choked back a laugh. "She has a Borgia face."

What were they talking about? Could she stay?

"Cosimo, I'm ready. Go to."

"Yes Gran." He opened a drawer. A pair of chrome scissors flashed white in his hands. Grandmother shook her hair, spreading it across her shoulders. Positioned behind her, Cosimo paused, put down the scissors and vanished into another room, returning a moment later with a rectangular mirror.

"Chlo', stand here, hold this, like so..."

She did as instructed. It was not a large mirror, but heavy. It pressed against her chest and she rested her chin on the frame. Grandmother stared ahead, blindly, her jawline stiffening. Cosimo slipped the shears into the jet black

hair and the blades bit through the strands with a gentle chewing sound. He lifted a two and a half foot tress free, and lay it across a stool. The operation continued, and throughout, the expression on the old woman's face remained unaltered. Cosimo reverently deposited lock after lock on the stool, until she sat, ravaged and exposed on the chair. Chloe imagined she saw her shiver, but it was far too warm.

The roots were grey. Cosimo produced a ribbon from his shorts' pocket and bound the relic with a bow. For length and texture, it could have been a horse's tail. Perceiving shock in the old woman's immobility, he began dancing around the chair making rapid little hand gestures, poking, nudging, caressing.

"Red Gran--red. Can't you see it? And a permanent. A foam of red to frame the face."

She frowned.

"Trust me. I am an artist."

"You weld metal."

"Never mind. I have the eye. It would be soft, yet arresting. And think... you could go in for a whole other colour of eye shading."

She raised her arms, the flesh rippling, and fluffed the ragged fringe. "Greens. I haven't used greens for years."

"Yes. Greens."

The edge of the sari was snapped up and wrapped around her head like a turban. She turned, this way and that, gauging by the half profile what the effect might be. Chloe shifted the mirror. Her back ached. They had forgotten she was there.

"Yes." The makeshift turban fell away as she stood. More water splashed on the floor. "Take me to a hair salon: Red, Frizzy. Sarah Bernhardt. I saw her you know, during The Great War..." Her hands flew up to emphasise the greatness of it. "The Marne. Entertaining the troops. She'd just lost her leg, and they hoisted her around in a sedan chair. She was magnificent. Yes... red." She stepped out of the tub and flung a length of sari behind her. "And you can take the child shopping. With your 'artist's' eye, I trust you can improve on that." As she turned, she plucked the pony-tail that was curled on the counter and tossed it in the garbage pail. "She recited the Marseillaise. Artillery was pounding, not far away at all, but the men were absolutely still as she spoke... a clear high voice, and the guns. What stands out in my memory was how grey they were. Grey uniforms, grey faces... you couldn't tell where the mud left off and the men began. She wore white..." Grandmother climbed onto the chair, clasped a breast with one hand, and stared intently at the other which was raised, beseeching the light fixture. "...and lanterns were planted around her on this platform. Nothing in my life, before or since, surpassed that experience."

There was silence for a moment as they stared at the light. Then she stepped off the chair and headed towards the stairs, the wet silk trailing along the tiles. Chloe thought that perhaps nothing in her life would ever compare to this experience. They were going to buy her clothes. She could stay. She wanted to shout and jump up and down. She could stay. From

Cosimo stood by the fridge. "What flavour popsicle do you prefer?"

Chloe propped the mirror against the wall and collapsed in the vacant chair. It was still warm. Everything was warm. Too warm. She plunged her hands into the tub. Small particles of ice still floated on the surface. Freezing. Nice.

"Blueberry."

"A girl after me own heart. Blueberry it is." He triumphantly produced the familiar package and forced the two halves apart on the counter edge. She could never manage without breaking it across the top. He wiggled the halves out and handed her one.

"How old are you?"

He bit off the top and sucked as he answered. "Thirty."

He didn't act like any of the grownups she knew. Thirty. The popsicle frosted white. In a moment it would melt. She preferred to suck until it was soft and then bite.

"Do you do anything except hang around here?"

"Ouch. Aren't you blunt?"

"I'm sorry. I never know what to say."

"While at the same time not lacking for words. As a matter of fact, I'm a sculptor. Working with an acetylene torch doesn't seem quite the thing while we're having a heat wave, a tropical heat wave, it isn't surprising, the temperature's rising..." He stopped singing and pointed out the window. "That's mine in the garden."

An erection of metal extruded from a bed of lavender.

Large oval pieces hung from the central shape, and clanged gently against each other as water from the sprinkler touched them. She couldn't think of anything nice to say about it, so she didn't say anything at all. Apt advice from Thumper's mother.

"So how are you my cousin? You're so old."

"Ouch again. Our father's were brothers. Twins."

"Oh yeah. I saw a picture. Your father died."

"Before you were born. And my mother. I wish she could see you now."

"Why?"

He turned and started cleaning the mess on the counter.

"We saw you when you were a tiny baby. You were beautiful.

Little red fists and face, and all that black hair. Or

nearly black, like Gran's. Dark and thick. She claims Oriental ancestry, but between you, me and the lamp post, she makes

it up because it sounds interesting. Black Irish. Maiden

name O'Brien. There's a Spanish pirate back there somewhere.

"My father has ginger hair, like you. It must be nice to look like people."

"You mean, great aunt Matilda's chin, and all that?"

"Yeah. My mother's blonde and blue eyed. And small. I'm nearly as tall as her now. At one of their cocktail parties once, some man came up to me patted my head, and called me a little changeling. People are weird."

"Yup." He smiled.

"Who's Sarah Bernhardt?"

"You little Philistine."

The popsicle dripped onto her fingers and she sucked furiously before it fell off. Cosimo delicately bit the lower part of what remained of his, and balanced the rest on the broadness of the stick until he was ready for it.

"Why does my father hate her? He won't answer her letters. He hides them."

"Who? Sarah Bernhardt?"

"Come on. You know."

He became serious. "There was a falling out. You were just a baby."

"Over what?"

"It's complicated. They were never crazy about each other. My father didn't get on with her either."

"She ran away to France with her paramour." Chloe paused to savour the word. "She abandoned them."

The side of his mouth twitched. "How old did you say you were? Never mind. Like I said, it's complicated."

"And you're not going to tell me anything."

"And I'm not going to tell you anything. You know, we have a lot in common. I ran away from home too, only I held out till I was thirteen. Consider the possibility that our twin fathers, and even when they were pudgy lads, are, or were in my father's case, so obnoxious, that everybody ends up running away from them. Parents, children, dogs, cats..."

Chloe giggled and he tilted the last bit of popsicle in his mouth, dropping the stick in the garbage pail.

"What do you know about my parents?"

He took out the length of hair and ran it through his fingers.

"I also ran away to France. From a school in Switzerland. If you were to follow the family tradition, you'd be in Paris by now."

"No passport."

"Ah. Have you ever seen a fly swatter made from horsehair?"

"Why did you run away?"

"I think I'll have a handle put on this. Why did you?"

Chloe stared at the floor. The spilled water had evaporated, leaving faint rings on the tiles. He dropped the question and hooked the ribbon over a nail where a calendar was suspended. The hair covered the squares someone had methodically x'd out. It was still at June. Today was July first. At this very moment, she should have been at Camp Dancing Cloud, sitting on a dock with her feet in the water, wishing she were somewhere else. Well, here she was. Somewhere else. She tossed her stick in the garbage and rinsed her fingers in the tub. The ice had melted and the water was warming rapidly.

"Our little plague of pestilence seems worse today. Did you bring your own?" The screen was peppered with bugs. He tapped the door with his foot and they scattered in all directions.

#

Grandmother, dressed sedately in white linen, paused at the top of the stairs. Chloe was disappointed. She had expected something a little more flashy. The shaggy black hair was pushed under a floppy planter's hat, and her eyes were heavily shaded in green. Preparation, no doubt, for the great transformation. Cosimo was wearing extremely short shorts and a sport shirt, and was waiting, hands deep in his pockets, at the foot of the stairs. Grandmother took her time descending. She held a small straw hat with striped streamers. Halfway down, she aimed it at Chloe.

"Put it on. Your nose is already ridiculously red. You look like Emmet Kelly. More exposure and it's sure to peel."

It skidded across the floor and came to rest at Chloe's feet. She picked it up. It was a child's hat, old and dusty.

"Your father's. Or his." She waved a gloved hand at Cosimo. "Neither has any use for it. Take care or you'll look like a piece of old boot leather by the time you're twenty. Look at me. I'm seventy-five and have the skin of a forty year old."

"Who cares what I'll look like when I'm twenty?"

"I care." She reached the bottom of the stairs and clapped the hat on Chloe's head. "I will allow no granddaughter of mine to resemble an old boot. Let's go."

Cosimo opened the front door and they stepped into the oppressive heat. He hailed a cab and ushered them into the back seat. Chloe peeked under the rim of Grandmother's

hat. The skin was thickly caked with pale powder. It didn't look forty. It looked eighty.

Chloe sat on the windowseat examining the blister on her little toe. After dropping Grandmother at the hair-dressers, she and Cosimo must have walked a million blocks. She was now wearing white pedal pushers and a loose top. Her new sandals lay on the floor. One of the stores was so big you couldn't see one end from the other. Another had a fountain that sprayed cologne. Then Cosimo had had the inspiration to have her hair cut. A surprise for Grandmother. She'd look just like Audrey Hepburn in 'Roman Holiday'. Chloe touched the bristle at the back of her neck and was not comforted. Sure. She looked just like a boy. Cosimo was planning on making a fly swatter from her hair too.

She opened the purse to see if the papers were safe. 'The State of New York declares...' Her parents said she had bad blood, but the papers didn't tell her anything. Maybe Grandmother and Cosimo knew something. Her parents were probably glad to be rid of her. She could see her mother carefully packing her silk dresses with tissue paper and asking her father if he had remembered the suntan lotion. Then he would throw back his shoulders and ask if she had got the passports from the safety deposit box. Then she would ask if the plane tickets were in his pocket, and have him sit on her bag because she'd stuffed it too full. Then one of them might say, 'Should we call the police?' and they'd tell them their address in Portugal, and where to deposit their daughter when she was found. Then they would climb into their

waiting Murray Hill limousine and head off to Dorval without giving her another thought.

Chloe snapped the purse shut and jumped off the seat. In the upstairs room where she sat everything was slipcovered in white: a couch, two fat chairs, an ottoman, the window cushions, even the drapes that hung in the still afternoon shadows. She lifted up a skirt. Underneath was a deep green velvet upholstery. The rug was green too, with designs of flowers and fabulous mythical animals; threadbare in parts, near the door and under the piano pedals. The instrument was closed and a bowl of calla lilies dominated the flat surface. The name Chickering in faded gold ran across the polished wood. She wanted to touch it, but the air in the room was dead. It hadn't been played in a long time. Maybe they didn't like music. Not the ghost of a note. Was it even in tune? A quiet apprehension grew. But it was here. There was a piano.

A large painting hung over the fireplace: a lady covered in water lilies. Was she dead? But her eyes were open and she was smiling. Not dead. Just floating. All greens like the rug. Cool. A beautiful lady.

Chloe sank into the deep down cushions of the couch and enjoyed the coolness of the cotton against her skin. She reached for the book on the coffee table, and could see the man-beasts and dragons distorted through the heavy glass top. A book of photographs, Grandmother, she supposed, in an old fashioned dress... a ball dress, diamonds at her throat and three white feathers sticking up from the back

of her head. A tiny waist. In the next photograph, she had babies in her arms; all three in white lace and ribbons, the babies in frilly gowns and bonnets. Twin baby girls. Her aunts? She had never heard of any aunts. Maybe they died. Maybe they were bad and nobody spoke about them. Maybe one of them was her mother. Maybe she really belonged here, in this house, with these people. Her toes curled as she touched the picture. And there were her father and Uncle Brian in sailor suits. She turned the page. Grandmother...Naked. Why did she leave the book out on the coffee table for anyone to look at. She could feel her face redden but she stared anyway. Where was she? In a forest? She was lying on moss, pale skin on moss and something between her breasts. A toad. A small toad. She is laughing, holding it there with the tips of her fingers. The nails are long. Her hair is spread across the moss. The toad is frightened. A shadow falls across her legs. What? The photographer. She is laughing with the photographer. The toad looks like a growth crouching there between the soft pure roundness of her breasts.

The door handle squeaked. She quickly flipped back to the photograph of the baby girls.

"Suppertime." Cosimo leaned against the door. He'd changed into long white pants. Everything white, defying the heat. Sunday at the country club. Tennis. Lawn bowling. Indian funerals. She'd seen pictures of someone's funeral. Thousands of people in flowing white standing around a fire. White shorts had been specified on her camp list. White for

prayers.

"Cosimo," She pointed at the picture on her lap. "Who are they?" Her heart was pounding. She casually slipped her feet into the sandals. He peeked over her shoulder.

"Our fathers, believe it or not. Although I can't figure out what they're doing in bonnets. Only girls are supposed to wear christening caps. Gran probably thought they looked cute. Conventionality was never her strong suit."

"Oh." She turned to the window as her vision blurred.

A blinding, disappointing white.

The dining room, panelled in dark wood, was cavernously gloomy. A chandelier, dripping hundreds of prisms from a scalloped depression, was unlit. The windows were wide open and a faint breath of air wafted through the heaviness. The only light, a purple light, crept in from the garden.

Grandmother sat at one end of the table, Cosimo at the other, and Chloe, squirming on a hard chair, took the centre, facing the twilight. A bowl of cold white soup loomed on the placemat. She pressed the spoon down through its thickness, watched as a hollow formed before it folded in on itself submerging the gleaming silver. Then it hung, before her mouth, the spoon with its cold white soup and sprinkling of chives. Shouldn't soup be hot?

"It's impolite to dangle your food in the air."

Grandmother sat ramrod straight in white Japanese silk with a stiff collar, her new hair a fluffy aura around the

face, and very red, even in the dim light. She seemed not to have noticed Chloe's stubble.

"Once you have interfered with the food, aim it directly for the mouth, like this." She spooned the soup toward her, then upward to the mouth with the dark red lipstick. Chloe resented being told how to eat, but couldn't say that she was suspicious of the soup. She imitated Grandmother, who nodded. Not only cold soup, cold potato soup. She lay her spoon on the saucer.

"That is correct. Manners are the lubricating oil of life. Remarkable what you can get away with if you have them."

Cosimo placed his spoon on the saucer and dabbed his mouth with the serviette. "There is a bum of my acquaintance who stations himself outside the better hotels: The Plaza, The Pierre, The Waldorf, but he wears a tux, and is always clean and freshly shaven. In good weather he lolls about outside on benches and when a sympathetic face passes, he smiles, staggers to his feet, and asks for cabfare. I always give it to him. His cleaning bills must be astronomical, and I suspect he is shaved by experts. If it's cold or rainy, he moves into the lobby, and nobody minds. I have a great admiration for any bum who respects the aesthetic principles of the class he is touching for booze money."

"Do you suppose for a change of pace he affects tweed and elbow patches to languish on the steps of colleges, libraries, and museums?"

"Or possibly The Algonquin?"

"Exactly."

They smiled at each other and resumed eating. Chloe felt the same way as she did when she turned on the T.V. show that was half over; she didn't know what they were talking about, and she didn't like the soup. Outside, the grasshoppers called, sang. The maid appeared and removed the soup plates. Hers was still full. Smitty, a short woman in late middle age with a tight bun and sensible shoes didn't comment. Neither did Grandmother, who smoothed her napkin and eyed Chloe.

"I am planning on calling your father this evening. Is there anything you might want to tell him?"

Chloe wasn't surprised. "They'll have left for their holiday by now."

"I doubt it."

She couldn't think of anything to say. "Well, tell him I'm fine, and that I hope he and his wife are well."

Cosimo chortled and Grandmother held the napkin over her mouth.

"Little cousin, there's something a twidge unnatural about you."

Her chest tightened and she clutched the edge of the tablecloth. "So I've been told."

"By whom?"

"By my so-called parents."

"Why so-called?"

"Well, I don't belong to them, do I? Not really."

Cosimo tilted his head and gazed at her. The old woman was silent.

"Why do you say that?"

She reached under her napkin, opened the plastic purse, and laid the papers on the table. "Here. Adoption papers. Mine."

Grandmother stood, walked over behind Chloe, and examined the documents. Then she looked at Cosimo.

"You just found out, and you're upset that they hadn't told you?" Cosimo played with his fork, tracking highways on the damask cloth and they lapsed into silence as Smitty entered with the second course. Pink fish in jelly. Cosimo stood and poured the wine. He gave Chloe half a glass and winked. Grandmother sat. The swinging door shot a breeze across the room as the maid departed. The china clinked as forks hit plates.

"People love adopted children just as much as natural children. Oftentimes, more, because it was so clearly a choice." Grandmother spoke slowly, carefully selecting her words. "You must know you were wanted."

Chloe shook her head. "No. That's not it. I've always known I was adopted. They used to leave little books around where I would find them: 'The Chosen Baby'. It's that they don't want me now. I didn't turn out the way they wanted." She twisted her napkin. Grandmother gulped back her wine and quickly refilled the glass.

"Why do you say that? What happened?"

"They wanted to send me to summer camp."

"Oh woe..."

"Shut up Cosimo." Grandmother ate the salmon aspic as Chloe sighed and picked. They wouldn't understand either.

"They wanted to go to Europe... like they do every year, but this year, instead of getting me a sitter..."

"They never took you?" She frowned.

"No. Anyway, this year, they signed me up at Camp Dancing Cloud... riding, swimming, sailing, swimming, archery, you know..."

"...bliss." said Cosimo.

They ignored him.

"I didn't want to go."

"Evidently. But why not?" He had finished most of his meal so he rested his fork and tried the wine.

"Honestly, Cosimo, haven't you ever been homesick?"

"Dear Gran, I've never left you any longer than a one night stand."

Chloe tasted the wine. It was bitter, but she drank it anyway. "That wasn't the reason. There is no piano at the camp."

"Pardon?"

"They had no piano. Two months without a piano... I'd lose everything."

"A piano?"

"Yes... a piano." She was getting impatient. Were they being deliberately thick? She excavated a chunk of

flesh and shaved off the aspic with her knife. It was Friday. Were they Catholic? She didn't mind fish but she preferred it hot, and she wasn't going to eat jello that didn't taste like dessert.

"You play?" There was more than curiosity in Grandmother's question. Shouldn't talk with your mouth full. There was a pause as she chewed and swallowed. Cosimo was down to two bites. He pushed back his chair, walked around the table, topped off Grandmother's glass, and returned to his own seat with the bottle.

"Yes."

"But camp... children usually enjoy that. Aren't any of your friends going?"

"I don't have any friends."

Grandmother impatiently pushed away her half finished plate. "Come now. You must have some. At school?"

"I don't have any."

"Well, when I was at school..."

"... all of thirty-eight days..."

"....even the pariahs formed thier own disgusting little cliques. I even formed one."

"And it got you expelled."

"Well, it beat football." Cosimo dabbed his mouth and lined his implements up neatly on the right side of his plate. Chloe drained her glass and reached for the bottle. No one stopped her. The room was practically dark. In the non-light, Grandmother appeared young, floating in the dark

like a water lily. It was her picture upstairs, floating, smiling at her. She shook her head.

"I'm more comfortable with adults."

"Are you afraid of other children?"

"Cosimo, you have the tact of a cashew."

They were all swimming in the dark. She filled her glass again as the grasshoppers shrilled; louder than the city hum.

"There's a music camp at Manasket Harbour in Maine. My teacher told me about it. She gave the pamphlet to my parents. They could have arranged to send me there, but they said they wanted me to have a 'normal' summer. Normal. They said they didn't want to encourage 'my anti-social tendencies'. But every time they have people over, they drag me downstairs to play, to show me off to their stupid friends who probably wouldn't know if I was playing with my feet. I heard them talking the other night when they thought I was asleep. They were saying I was too peculiar, and that I'd have to learn to deal with people and situations or I'd turn out like my crazy relatives."

Cosimo bit his thumb and Grandmother stared at the chandelier.

"Well, since I know I'm adopted, they must know who my real parents are, so yesterday, when they went out, I looked through the desk and found the papers, only they didn't have any names or anything. Then I noticed the letters at the back of the drawer. I thought you were dead. You asked

for letters. Did Father ever send any?"

Grandmother shook her head.

"Oh yeah, I forgot. He never opened them. I wonder why he kept them?" She could just discern the sadness of the pale face in the dark.

"Yes. One wonders. Cosimo, dear, more wine."

He retrieved the empty bottle from Chloe's place and swung out the door. The maid came back before he did and cleared. She shook her head at Chloe's full plate.

"Smitty, bring Chloe some ice cream. You do like ice cream, don't you?"

She nodded.

"A big dish. Vanilla?"

"Please."

Cosimo returned with another bottle. An old gas lamp had been lit in the garden. Grasshoppers flinging themselves between the moths were weaving erratically around the yellow light. There was a muted pop as the cork, wrapped in a serviette, was twisted from the bottle. Cosimo poured some over the fruit cup that Smitty had set before Grandmother, and some into her glass. Chloe looked at the mound of ice cream with hazy detachment.

"So, I thought that maybe you knew something about my real parents. You were around when I was a baby." The new bottle was within reach and she poured herself some. It fizzed over onto the tablecloth but was quickly absorbed by the fabric. She took a sip. Sweet. Nicer than the

other. She gulped it back and poured some more. Sort of like pop. The ice cream was melting.

"But I guess that's dumb. Adoptions are all secret, aren't they? And I guess they didn't want me either. Anyway, maybe I can stay here? I could do stuff. Vacuum the stairs. And you have a piano. Is it in tune? I wouldn't eat much. Gee, it's hot. The garden looks really pretty at night. Why do moths fly into light? Your hair is nice. Like a curly Kate..."

Grandmother shrugged.

"You know.. those copper things you scrub pots with... My head hurts. It's so hot. There are good music schools here. I checked. I wouldn't be different here. I bet you guys hug a lot."

Her purse slipped to the floor, and when she leaned over to pick it up, the room lurched and she found herself staring at the shadows on the ceiling. Then everything went black.

"You're late. The sausages are getting cold."

The fat, greasy links were piled unappetisingly in a silver dish on the table. Chloe turned away and held her mouth.

"I don't feel very well. It must be the heat."

"Well, have something. Toast, eggs, fruit, anything.

Breakfast is vital." Grandmother was pouring tea from a flowered pot into a flowered cup. Her hair looked even redder this morning. Chloe squinted against the light. Everything hurt. She pushed the sausages into the middle of the table

as she sat. There was a glass of orange juice beside her empty flowered plate.

"Where is that boy?"

"I passed him in the upstairs hall. He's talking on the phone. Owww..."

"What's the matter?" The spoon clinked loudly as she stirred her tea.

"My head hurts. My neck hurts. My chest hurts."

Grandmother looked concerned. "Have you had the Salk vaccine?"

"Yes." Chloe pushed the empty plate away.

"A touch of flu perhaps?"

"A touch of the morning after, perhaps?" Cosimo waltzed in and pecked Grandmother on the head. He sat down, forked several sausages on his plate, then eggs, then toast.

"You really shouldn't come to the table in your pajamas, Cosimo. What do you mean, the morning after?"

"Dear me, Gran. If after fifteen years of yours truly, you can't recognise a hangover, then I have failed, dismally in my rôle as the dissolute ward. She only fell off her chair at supper last night."

"I assumed it was heat prostration."

"Alcohol prostration."

Did they have to yell? Chloe rested her cheek on the placemat and marvelled at the loudness of the insects. Their trills were deafening. So this was a hangover. How could Cosimo eat all that food?

"It's bad manners to recline on the table. God gave you a spine. Use it."

She reluctantly straightened up and took a sip of juice. Cosimo peered over his coffee. "More... more. You're dehydrated."

Smitty trotted in and deposited a bowl of peaches on the table. She also gave Cosimo a bowl of cold cereal. He took a peach and expertly sectioned it onto the cornflakes, dumping the pit on the side of the plate. Smitty waited for a moment, observing with satisfaction his enthusiasm for her cooking. She seemed older in the daylight and wore no uniform.

"May I please be excused?"

"You may sit until everyone is finished," said Grandmother.

Chloe tried to think of something other than food.

"What's a sphincter?"

Grandmother looked up from her teacup. "A contractile muscular ring."

Cosimo dropped his fork and shifted in his seat. "Also a certain dessert delicacy... a kind of Bavarian cream."

"Cosimo, you talk nonsense."

More food talk. Chloe looked up at the chandelier. Little rainbows scattered over the walls and ceiling. "That makes more sense. It must have been a pretty good dessert the way you were raving about it on the telephone."

The room became blessedly silent. Only the grasshoppers outside disturbed her peace.

She didn't feel so sick now. Cosimo had fed her two aspirin and an anti-histamine pill.

Grandmother tied on a wide brimmed straw hat, then threw some gardening gloves in a tool basket. She wore baggy slacks and a smock that buttoned up the back. Chloe had buttoned them, and couldn't understand how Grandmother could stand wearing so much clothing. Her own legs were gloriously bare, and wrapped around the legs of a stool. The popsicle she was sucking dripped on her thighs. Cosimo sat opposite, chopping vegetables into tiny pieces, slowly, contemplatively. It was even hotter than yesterday.

"Chloe, come and help me weed."

"Yes Grandmother."

"Put on a hat or you'll get sunstroke." She flung the basket over her arm and brushed out the door. Chloe could hear the grasshoppers crunch under Grandmother's feet, and made a face at Cosimo, who grimaced back. He dumped the cucumber and green pepper into a big enamel bowl, white with a blue rim, then lined tomatoes along the breadboard. This was their typical, everyday routine, and here she was, fitting right in. Belonging.

She jumped off the stool. There was another hat hanging from a row of hooks beside the door. It was far too big but she wasn't climbing three flights of stairs to fetch another one. Through the door, she cautiously picked her way through the insects and squatted next to Grandmother, who was wrenching weeds from the dry earth with a practised hand.

Over the brick wall she could see the backs of the row of houses on the next block, and over them, the upper floors of a distant skyscraper. Maybe Cosimo would take her to the top of the Empire State Building if she asked.

Chloe tried to pull a weed out, but the stem snapped off as she tore it away. All the leaves were riddled with holes, flower and weed; all the leaves in the little garden. You could almost hear the grasshoppers chomping between choruses. She sat on her heels, mesmerized as they hurled through the air. They were on Grandmother's hat, on her clothes, on Cosimo's sculpture, rising out of the vibrating shafts of lavender. Everything was moving, shaking, wiggling.

Grandmother's hands flurried back and forth: grasp, twist, shake, grasp, twist, shake. The screen door slammed and Cosimo leaned against the bricks, twirling an onion.

"Onion or chives in the gazpacho?"

"Either, dear." She didn't look up. Cosimo slipped the onion into his apron pocket and stooped to pluck some leaves from a scruffy plant in an isolated patch beside the wall.

"Come and help me pick spices, Clo'."

Belonging. Being taken for granted. And a nick-name.

Was it possible to die from pleasure?

She selected leaves from the plant Cosimo pointed out. Sweet Basil. The other labels stuck on thin green sticks were coriander, mint, thyme, oregano, chives...

"A quelle heure arrivera son père?"

His accent was flat, American. No. you didn't die from pleasure, only from sadness, and not all of you, only

little bits of you. Chloe ignored an insect on her knee and continued picking Sweet Basil. Her Grandmother continued weeding, and Cosimo continued to sniff the Thyme. Studied normality. She couldn't see her grandmother's expression beneath the brim of her hat as she answered.

"Presque midi." Her French was much better, but then, she had lived in France.

"La petite ne connaissait rien."

Chloe gritted her teeth.

"The petite connaissait plenty, and I won't see him."

"Shit." Cosimo threw the thyme down. "She understands French."

Grandmother watched as Chloe smashed the insect with her fist and stood up.

"Well good grief, you couldn't live in Montreal and not know French."

Grandmother looked down and ripped another weed from the earth, shaking it free of dirt. "Henchforth we shall conduct out confidences in Esperanto. I am sorry, Chloe, but I had no choice in the matter. My desire to see David is even less than your own, but he is your father, and your legal guardian, and although I concede this with the greatest regret, he does have certain rights." She pulled off the gloves and threw them in the basket. Cosimo was silent. Chloe looked back and forth between them.

"God. It's rotten being ten. No one ever asks you what you think. They just tell you what's best for you."

Nobody gives a damn what I want. I thought you were different. I thought you cared, but I was wrong. You're the same as them. Thanks a bunch. She slammed the door as she stormed into the kitchen, sending the grasshoppers flying.

Her music never failed her. It didn't now. After an hour of pounding out her frustration, the room was ringing. She rested her hands on the keys and traced the dragon under the pedal with her toe. She had locked herself in the room, and several times while she was playing, had been aware of the handle moving up and down, but no one had really bothered her or asked her to stop. It was a lovely piano, in tune and with a light action. Easy to play. She'd moved the vase of lilies to the coffee table and propped the lid open. The hammers danced. Horns from a distant traffic jam pushed in and mingled. It was 'around noon' now. Was he flying in or taking the train? He'd be extra angry because he'd have to cancel his last day of surgery before his trip, and reschedule for another time when the O.R. was free, which meant postponing the trip, because the ladies with the big noses and saggy jowels wouldn't wait until he returned from Portugal, and that meant he'd have to change the airline tickets. Oh, he'd be mad all right. Arriving in New York around noon, or here at the house around noon? She jumped off the bench and over to the window. Smitty was scrubbing the stoop. She closed her eyes and listened to the scritch of the stiff bristled brush and the slop of the water. And the

slam of a car door. Arriving here around noon. She didn't look down. She knew it was him. Her head was hurting again and the air snapped into silence. No ringing. Only the chirruping and bolting of grasshoppers. Unnatural. She crossed the room and unlocked the door.

"You should have called the moment she arrived... but that would have been the normal logical thing to do. You don't know about normal and logical, do you, Mother?"

Chloe had never heard her father use that tone of voice. She had heard him scream in anger, but never sound cold and calculatedly cruel. She huddled on the dining room floor beside the fern stand. The fronds rustled slightly as they brushed her head. The sliding doors into the living room were partly open. She listened. Cosimo spoke in a flat, practical tone.

"She left a note."

A paper rustled. Her father's voice, reading: " 'I can't live like this anymore. You'll be happier without me. Have fun in Europe.' Some note. She didn't take anything, no clothes... nothing. What were we to think? We nearly had the police dredge the river. How did she get here anyway? She has no money."

"She had well over two hundred dollars. She found my letters. I put money in them. You should have burned them, David. And she had papers." Grandmother spoke in a voice like a poised hatchet. Chloe crawled between the chairs

of the table to see what was happening. Her father and Cosimo stood, while grandmother dangled a hand with rings over the arm of a wing chair. Cosimo leaned against the mantle, smoking, while her father remained beside the door, frowning.

"Papers? What papers?"

"Adoption papers. She arrived on our doorstep seeking information about her 'real' parents."

Chloe's father sat down on the love seat. Cosimo, flicking an ash in the grate, added: "And she wants to live here."

It was tossed off casually, but with a malice Chloe couldn't comprehend. He breathed out a plume of smoke and stared at the small bronze nude on the mantle. Her father's knuckles were white.

"Get her. We're leaving."

Grandmother stood. Her red hair clashed with the bright green dress. "And are you shipping her off to camp Singing Cloud?"

"...Dancing Cloud. And where I send her is none of your damned business."

"If I had known that you were going to abandon her two months every year..."

"...You what?"

Chloe bit the inside of her cheek. No one had ever argued with her father before. He was used to having his own way. They must care for her if they were arguing for her.

"She has always been adequately supervised."

"Adequately supervised. Do you hear yourself, David? Is that why people have children, to give them adequate supervision?" Chloe tensed. The moment her father was put on the defensive she usually sneaked off to her room.

"She doesn't want to go. She's dreadfully unhappy."

"I won't be dictated to by a ten year old."

"She mentioned a music camp..."

"Arrangements have been made. You don't know her. I know what's best for her."

"You do?" Cosimo was incredulous. He threw his cigarette in the fireplace and ran his fingers through his thick ginger hair. The same as her father's; and blue grey eyes, the same as her father's. The two men glared at each other, the same height, the same colouring; they could have been father and son.

"I know my rights." He was wearing his usual three piece suit. In this heat. Cosimo took a step toward him, but Grandmother held his arm and steered him to the couch. She pushed him down and turned to her son.

"If only you showed some consideration for her feelings."

"Consideration for her feelings?" He was shouting. Blood was creeping up from his neck to his face. Chloe's head was bursting. She pressed her fingers to her temples.

"... and you, of course, are the expert about children's feelings. How much consideration did you give for our feelings, Brian's and mine, when you tucked us in for the last time, read us a story, kissed us goodnight, and calmly boarded

the liner for France? I can still remember the story you read... 'The Tinder Box'. After you left, I used to sneak into your dressing room and smell your scarves. Perfume still clung to them. Then one day they were all gone. Everything. Daddy finally realised that you were never coming back. So did we. We were five. You didn't even write."

"I wrote. Your father must have destroyed the letters. I told you I wrote."

"That's right. Blame it on Father. That frog must have been some good lay to make you forget your children."

She slapped him, then stood, trembling. Chloe never imagined that he could feel pain too. Is that why he didn't hug... those perfumed hugs still haunted him?

"I never forgot you. I would have taken you with me, but there was a war on."

"How convenient. So noble a sacrifice. And what about Father? Would you have taken him too?"

"Oh, David. You don't understand anything, do you? Your life has been so correct. You don't destroy letters, you simply bury them in drawers. You told her I was dead. No one I love ever seems to get my letters. It's almost comical. I'd cry, but when you're my age, the tears just don't come anymore. Have you ever cried, David?"

"Not since you left. You lost your rights to Chloe the day you left me. If you don't fetch her, I will."

Chloe fixed her eyes on the shivering facets of Grandmother's emerald ring as she crawled out from under

the table.

"I'm here."

They froze and stared at her. Her father was the first to speak.

"Get some shoes on. We're leaving."

She stood beside the wing chair without moving. His face was purple. She had never felt so helpless. Her feelings were mirrored in the faces of Grandmother and Cosimo. They did want her. If it was up to them, she'd be able to stay. There was a mutual recognition of belonging. Her father was clenching and unclenching his fists. In a moment, she felt strangely peaceful. Maybe that was enough, to know you belonged somewhere, even though you couldn't be there.

"I order you to get ready. I won't have you here another minute. This woman is an unhealthy influence. Look what they've done to you already... your hair..."

"I am a perfectly good influence. What right..."

"God, Mother. Mother. The word sticks in my throat. Your track record is still unbeaten. When they stopped coming to you did you pull them in off the street? And does this little faggot do your pimping for you?"

"The child..." Grandmother waved her arm helplessly.

"The child should know what I'm rescuing her from..."

Cosimo jumped up from the couch and grabbed his suit lapel. "You shut up." The words were hissed between his teeth. Her father stepped back and Cosimo stood immobile, his hand in the air. Grandmother had turned toward the wall.

"Chloe, move." He clutched her upper arm. A three-piece suit, and it was ninety-five. She'd only seen his legs once, when she'd walked into the bathroom without knocking. Did he wear a bathing suit or shorts in Portugal? Did he own any? Why was he like this? They'd lived under the same roof for ten years and she didn't even know him. They'd never had a 'conversation.' She'd received lectures, instructions and, what was the phrase they used?... adequate supervision. Why had he adopted her anyway? She had no idea. He was a stranger. She yanked her arm from his hand.

"Stop it," she screamed. "I hate this. I hate this! I hate this! I'll go back with you. I have no choice. I'll go to that stupid camp and go to their stupid Indian pow-wows and learn how to make a stupid camp fire. It's what you want, and I can't fight you, but you can't change me either. I'm not suddenly going to grow freckles and make friends." She studied the rug: more beasts and flowers. Then they blurred, faded together as the tears welled in her eyes. "You never asked what I wanted. Not once. Not one lousy time."

Grandmother was standing by the window, lost in the light. Chloe sniffed and the tears dripped freely down her cheeks.

"I love you, Granny. I love you too, Cosimo. I'll write. I promise." She moved in Grandmother's direction but her father held her arm. She tore loose, spun round, and screamed: "Don't touch me. Don't you ever touch me. You have no right to touch me."

His florid skin was beaded with perspiration. As often

as she had wanted to, she had never raised her voice to him before. She had always taken her frustrations out on the piano. He gazed, speechless, as she ran over to hug the old woman. Chloe buried her face in the folds of smooth silk, the scent of verbenas. Grandmother held her, rocking gently, stroking her hair. Cosimo moved beside them and she transferred to his arms. The slight bristle on his cheeks chafed her skin. She pressed closer. She wanted to hoard every sensation. He produced a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped her eyes. She blew her nose into the crumpled linen and clenched it like an amulet. Her father made a hesitant gesture as she stood, protected on either side by her cousin and Grandmother.

"I won't allow any of her letters to reach you. I forbid communication." He was practically vibrating. Grandmother shook her head. How was it possible, Chloe thought, that they were flesh and blood? What he had missed by not permitting himself to be loved. What he had lost.

"Call... collect." Little laugh lines formed at the corners of Cosimo's eyes and he squeezed her so hard she thought her ribs would crack; and outside, the grasshoppers sang.

Chloe lit a cigarette and eyed the doctor sitting across the desk. He was busy scribbling words in her record. The leaves rippled on the poplar tree outside the window as a grey squirrel ran along a branch. What was she supposed to present him? What did he want to hear? Words, phrases pregnant with possibility, fraught with deeper meaning. She had nothing to say to this man. His sleek peppered hair was so perfect, it could have been a wig. He wore contact lenses, tinted blue. She could tell for the outer rim of the iris was quite clearly pale grey. She didn't trust people with pale grey eyes. Her father's eyes were pale grey. So were Laurence's. So were Hitler's. Oh, stop it. There were probably millions of perfectly nice people walking around who had pale grey eyes. She had simply never met any of them. She always had the eerie impression that those with pale grey eyes could read her mind. Maybe that's why the doctor wore contact lenses; to make his patients feel more at ease. But wouldn't it be an advantage to have patients think he could read minds? Maybe that wasn't it at all. Perhaps he simply wore lenses so no one would think he was hiding behind horn-rimmed glasses.

She tore the edge of a fingernail with her teeth. Stop it. There was probably an article in one of his journals... 'Nail Biting: Manifest Symptom of Free Floating Anxiety'. Don't be stupid. You've always bitten your fingernails. All

it means is that you're biting your fingernails. What was normal, psychiatrically acceptable behavior, anyway? Should you look at him or look away, out the window, at the bookshelves? Couch or chair? What the Hell does it matter? Chair. Face to face, eye to eye, the direct approach. He is twitching: a facial tick. How interesting. Stare him down. He's smiling again, that sweet fatherly smile acquired in medical school. Paternalism 101. Proper bedside manner. Couchside manner. Chairside manner. Perhaps not so fatherly. Perhaps, just perhaps, there is a little boy-girlness going on here. Perhaps he is having a small fantasy about leading you over to the couch and having a little grope on this hot summer morning. Hence the twitch. Manifest symptom of repressed desire. A copy of the Hypocratic oath in a thin black frame occupied a conspicuous place on the wall to the right of his desk.

Dr. Homsy swiveled his chair to face the window. Like a child who'd been the last to blink in a staring contest, she felt a sense of triumph. Just for fun, she unbuttoned her dress, three buttons, exposing a soft curve of breast. A paperweight sat atop a thick stack of file folders. It looked like the earth as seen from space; swirls of white clouds suspended in the glass over a core of iridescent greens and blues. Chloe carefully extracted the top folder. He stiffened and was about to stop her until he realised she was simply using it to fan herself. The rush of traffic blended with the rush of leaves, and he loosened his

white coat revealing a blue sport shirt that matched his eyes. Did he pick the shirt to match the lenses, or the lenses to match the shirt? Did he have more than one pair of tinted lenses? Chloe imagined five little cases lining a shelf of his medicine cabinet: blue, amber, brown, green, and violet. She'd have to notice his eye colour tomorrow. All those eye colours could be confusing on a driver's licence.

"It's Bastille day." Now there was a non-sequitor for him.

"Is it significant?"

"We used to celebrate with fireworks... a holiday... a liberation."

"You and your parents?"

"No. I said a liberation. Me and my... cousin, and Grandmother."

"You miss them."

Chloe resented his statement, his casual intrusion into her private territory. Of course she missed them. Why had she mentioned them?

"... Chloe?" He tapped his pencil. It was irritating. Didn't they teach them not to be irritating, or was it a tactic, like when you try and psych-out a chess opponent into blowing his carefully planned strategy? She had no strategy. His pencil tapping was wasted on her.

"My parents went to Europe every summer. When I was little, they hired a sitter, but later, it was camp. Ten

onwards. I wasn't allowed to see Grandmother or Cos, but they visited me at camp."

"And brought fireworks." He tilted his chair back and rested his feet on an open drawer. The casual pose. Put her at ease.

"And pic-nics."

"Did you enjoy camp?"

"Not the first camp. It was dreadful. Gung-ho outdoorsiness. I was never an outdoorsie kid. I hated it. I remember signing up for sailing. There was something appealing about skimming over the water. Then I learned that you couldn't go out in a boat until you could swim six-hundred and fifty yards. I nearly drowned trying, then spent the entire summer sitting in a sailboat that was tied to the dock, memorizing: the rudder, the mast, the boom, the centre-board, the jib, the mainsail." Chloe's arms were stuck to the vinyl arms of the chair. "But I'm sure you aren't interested in my camp experiences."

"No? What do you think would interest me?" He cocked his head and twirled the pencil between his fingers: a tiny baton. Zip-boom-bah. Pictures of his wife and children filled the walls, along with framed diplomas and fellowships in various societies. She recognised some her father had belonged to. He, however, had displayed his in the reception room, to impress potential face-lifts. He had never wanted her in the waiting room. Her unrepentant youth and wrinkle-free skin must have depressed the clientele. But maybe she was being

too harsh on his memory. He also made considerable advances in methods for facial reconstruction and skin grafting for accident and burn victims. Or so his obituary said. All she could remember were the tummy tucks and silicone implants. Her mother had been the best preserved fifty-year-old on the block.

"What would interest me, Chloé?"

"To know why I pushed Jane off the piano bench."

"Okay. Why did you push Jane off the piano bench?"

Chloe didn't want to talk anymore. She didn't want to explain why she pushed Jane off the piano bench, because she didn't know herself. She didn't want to have to figure it out. She didn't want to think. He was staring at her with his ersatz blue eyes, waiting. She had to say something.

"But I loved the second camp. To save face, Father insisted I go to Camp Dancing Cloud, but the next year I discovered they'd signed me up for Manasket Harbour. They didn't tell me 'til they took me to the bus, though. I could never figure out why they didn't tell me. They just kept up this charade that I was going back to the other place. Maybe they just didn't bother mentioning it, and I assumed they were sending me back. I can't remember. But I do remember thinking, as I was sitting on the bus, how odd it was that they hadn't told me. Years later, I realised that if they had discussed it with me, it would have meant admitting that they had made a mistake in their original choice. They never admitted their mistakes. Come to think of it, they

never apologised either. I was the kid. I was wrong. That was that. Case closed."

"How was Manasket Harbour so different from the first camp?"

"It was great. It was a music camp for undisciplined spoiled brats. It almost said as much in the brochure. I even went back as a councillor for three extra years. The first day I was there, I found out you didn't have to know how to swim to go sailing. Nobody cared if you drowned. Then you learned, because nobody cared. You learned to care about yourself."

"And other people...?"

"What?"

"Did you learn to care about other people?"

"I...I... yes. Of course."

"What about Jane? Why did you push her onto the floor?"

"Oh, come on. She's a nuisance. She was driving me crazy. You should put her in a closed ward."

"She's harmless. You could have asked her to move."

"Yes, I suppose I could have." Her cigarette had burned out in the ash tray. She took another from the doctor's pack.

"Well?"

She snapped the lighter and tossed it back on the desk. It hit the paperweight and bounced onto the leather surface near the doctor's hand.

"Don't treat me like a case."

"You are a case. My case. As desperately as you are trying to forget it." Another smile wafted across the desk,

as warm and ingratiating as the breeze. The squirrel in the tree, chattered and washed its face.

"Do you think I can forget it with people like Crazy Jane trailing around after me? I think I want to go home."

"You think?"

"All right! I know I want to go home now. Is that decisive enough for you?"

"Not for me, Chloe. Are you ready to go home?"

"Someone once told me that I always wanted to be some place else..."

"Chloe?"

"But that doesn't figure here, does it? I mean, who would want to be here?"

"Is it so bad here?" Dr. Homsy took one of the cigarettes himself, but didn't light it. He held it in one hand and played with the lighter in the fingers of the other. It was an old silver lighter, shaped like a Corinthian column. There was a small sapphire on the dial that adjusted the height of the flame. He kept flicking it, and twisting the jewel, and the flame grew and diminished, again and again. After a minute, Chloe tore her eyes away and concentrated on the tree outside the window. The squirrel was gone. What was he trying to do? Hypnotize her? She did not like being manipulated. She did not like having circumstances out of her control. She did not like committing herself to the set structures of the institution. Having the nervous breakdown was humiliating enough, but now she had to ask a nurse every

time she wanted to take a bath.

"Chloe?"

That was another thing she hated. She never asked him to call her Chloe. She didn't call him Henry or Harry or Hal or whatever he called himself. She wasn't a child. She usually avoided the issue by not calling him anything.

"I have a better cook."

"Jun." It was her Oriental houseman he meant.

"Yes." She really didn't want to talk anymore. The thin silk was glued to her back with sweat. Hal Homsy. Homsy Hal.

"You said Jun was in Paris. Anyway, I don't think the food's so bad here."

"Then you must like your food grey and shapeless. And tasteless. I want to leave."

"You may leave whenever you wish, but I don't think you're ready. Not yet."

"The piano here is terrible."

"Is that your reason, then?"

"It's as good a reason as any. The sound of slippers on linoleum is beginning to get me down. The furniture is tacky. I detest the colour of my room. The nurses are brusque. Pick a reason, any reason." She butted her cigarette in his ashtray and straightened the skirt of her dress across her knees. The crêpe de chine sat lightly on her skin. Being there, in that chair, facing that doctor, and having him trying to pry words out of her, was as physically discomfoting as an itch one couldn't scratch.

"When will you leave us?"

When will you leave us? With a regretful little twist in his voice. Like a hotel manager confronted with the impending departure of season guests. Sorrow in his voice and accounts in his head. Poor Homsy Hal wasn't going to get an article out of her.

"I'd like to spend some time with my son before he goes to school. Laurence is sending him to boarding school."

"So you mentioned Yesterday. And the day before."

"Well, this time I mean it. I'm going to leave. I don't know what I'm doing here."

"As I said, we can always use the room. Name a day and I'll arrange your discharge papers."

Why didn't he shut up? She didn't want to think anymore. She just wanted to go back to her room and lie on the bed. With the door shut.

"Chloe...?"

"Tomorrow maybe. Or the day after."

The doctor tilted the chair back and gazed at the ceiling. "Perhaps you'd like to contact Jun first, and see if he'll come home."

"Good idea."

"So you'll leave in about a week? When he's home."

"Fine. But Jun wants to stay in Paris through August. He might not agree to come home. Why would anyone want to be in Paris in August? There's nothing doing. Everyone goes to the country. Everything's shut. It's hot. It's dead. The

first time I went to New York it was hot. It wasn't dead though. Montreal doesn't fold up in the heat either. Everything just slows down. A fine justification for sloth. Sloth, sloth. What a good word. Anyone would know what it meant from the sound of it."

The doctor made further notes, then offered her another of his cigarettes. She declined and pushed the ashtray away. The smell of butts was beginning to bother her.

"So why don't you think I'm ready to leave?"

"Why do you think I don't think you're ready to leave?"

"Please... no Chinese puzzles. Why don't you people ever give a straight answer? Any answer?"

"Ah..." He laid his finger along the side of his nose.

"... that would be cheating."

"Well...?"

"I think it would be a good idea if we could discover what triggered your breakdown, don't you?"

"I'm better. I haven't curled up in a corner in weeks."

"Do you think you handled the situation with Jane like a person who was in complete control?"

"Drop Jane. Drop her, drop her, drop her." What was left of her fingernails bit into the palms of her hands. Dr. Homsy tapped the pencil against her file.

"Okay. No more Jane."

"It's my birthday today. I'm thirty-eight."

"Happy birthday."

"Sebastian sent me red roses and a *négilgée*."

"Oh."

"Aren't you going to ask some provoking question about Sebastian?"

"What should I ask?"

"Oh, I don't know. How do I rationalize our relationship."

"Does it need rationalizing?"

"No. It's convenient... for both of us."

"Okay."

"He's a terrific manager and he's great in bed."

"Am I arguing?"

"And he doesn't crowd me."

"Good."

God, the man was irritating. Chloe stood up and walked around the chair. He jotted a few notes.

"I get claustrophobic easily. I am claustrophobic now."

"Well, why don't you go back to your room, or take a walk on the mountain. We've had a productive session." He didn't even raise his eyes. She was usually walked to the door. It pained her that hospital doors with their pneumatic hinges, were unslammable. She liked to mark her exits.

* * *

3

The cot squeaked as her young tent-mate rocked herself to sleep. Chloe gripped the head of the iron bedstead and waited. The overweight pre-pubescent clarinetist tattled to the councillors whenever Chloe bent a rule. It was a new camp policy to bunk first-timers with senior campers, and as far as Chloe was concerned, it was a terrifically lousy idea. The small metal whine gradually ceased. The fat child snored: undoubtedly all that excess pressing up on her larynx.

Chloe lay in silence for several minutes, breathing the rubbery, camphor scent of sleeping bag, hearing the ripple of oiled canvas as a salty breeze whispered through the wooden platform. She slowly drew the zipper down, taking care that it not snag on the lining, and lowered her feet to the floor. She rolled her jeans halfway up her calves and straightened the navy sweatshirt. The child's breathing was heavy and regular as Chloe tip-toed past in the dark.

The soles of her feet, toughened by two shoeless weeks, scarcely felt the prick of pine needles or the velvety texture of the fine sand as she came out of the woods onto the dunes. She paused, turning her head east, then west. The overpowering sweetness of wild roses, the tang of pine resin. Paths, pale in the moonlight wound over the dunes,

ending where quartz and sandstone rocks fell away to meet the tidal surge. Chloe hummed a piece by Bach, something from 'A Well Tempered Klavier'. Its classic exactitude fitted the perfect serenity of the moon filled night. Bach could soothe the savage breast or make the calm, calmer. You couldn't beat Bach; no, no, you couldn't beat Bach for that, Chloe thought as she stepped over pools in the rock hollows, teeming with sea urchins, periwinkles and crabs. Even the rotten seaweed smell pleased her.

A small campfire glowed at the opposite point of the thin arc of sand bounding the cove. The councillors were having a clam feast. Their voices carried over the thin flux of the night waves that lapped across Manasket Harbour. It was low tide. She didn't stop to eavesdrop. They talked about competitions, and the interpretation of 'rubato' and bored her silly. All but Kurt. He was there too, his arm across the shoulders of a girl councillor. She could pick him out from the others by his white-blond hair. Would he ever put his arm across her shoulders, she wondered? Yesterday, when she had asked him to play a piece for four hands with her, a piece she had practised so long and so hard she could probably perform it blindfolded in her sleep, the moment he sat beside her on the bench, something happened. She probably made a world record for wrong notes in a five minute piece. That was all he could stand. After the first movement, as she sat staring at her traitor hands, he'd closed the lid and closed the book, and said nothing.

Absolutely nothing. He could have lectured her, or yelled at her for wasting his time, but no. All he did was put the music on her lap and leave without a word. Without a damn word.

She wanted him to grab her, and shake her, and care. Since the first night, two weeks ago, when she had passed the house and heard the piano, she had been in love. He was playing Liszt's 'Mephisto Waltz', unaware anyone was listening. She stood by the window as he bent over the piano, his hands flying. By any standards, it was a tremendously demanding piece. (Liszt was a virtuoso ham, composing works that anyone but Liszt would have difficulty managing.) Chloe had her own litmus test of perfection: when she was confronted with excellence, her hair stood on end. Her hair stood on end when she heard Kurt play. She had sunk down in the tall weeds beside the window, aching with desire, unable to make her presence known; paralysed. In subsequent recitals, before small groups of campers, Kurt's apparent talents never quite passed 'extremely gifted,' and she yearned for her hair to stand on end again. If he played for her, just for her, just the two of them, alone... but first she had to get him to notice her.

Chloe stepped off the rocks and along a short stretch of beach to the breakwater. The kids from Boston called it a jetty. From the French, jeter: to throw, fling, and arm of boulders cast out into the water, indicating the channel entrance.

The moon was so bright the flats were revealed with all the clarity of a pallid day. Her shadow was clearly defined on the hard sand. What had Cosimo called it? A bomber's moon.

All the blackout curtains in London didn't help her on cloudless nights when the moon was full. She imagined the glimmer of the Thames as it snaked between the dull, reflective roofs and stone.

A sand dollar lay beside a tangle of kelp. Chloe picked it up. More like a sand quarter. The massive granite boulders of the breakwater loomed before her, and she counted seven above the line of dried seaweed. The powdery sand sifted through her toes. She reached into the familiar crevice and removed two cigarettes and some matches from a plastic bag. On the channel side of the rocks was a huge table of granite. The current swept soundlessly past where the lights of the marker buoys made shining trails on the water. Chloe sat on the flat rock and struck the match three times before it finally sputtered into flame. She lit one of the cigarettes. The match hissed as it hit the water and was propelled up-river. The glassy surface masked a fierce undertow. It was forbidden to swim the treacherous narrows, but every year someone did, then someone else until a near drowning, and daredevilry was abandoned until the next season. A lobster boat, lantern blazing in the stern, slid between the stone arms towards the port. Its wake slapped hollowly on the underside of the rocks. One of the lobstermen waved, and she gestured back, the coal of her cigarette revealing her presence, but not her identity.

An explosion of laughter from the beach rent the night. Chloe dangled her feet in the water and waited for the keen

numbing pain. Tomorrow was Bastille day, and Grandmother and Cosimo would come with food and fireworks to celebrate her birthday. She would be fifteen. The clear luminous notes of a flute pierced the soft air: the opening melody of 'L'Après Midi d'un Faun'. Peering over the jetty, she could see a flash of silver in the firelight. An isolated, uniquely perfect moment, perhaps made the more perfect for her small sorrow. She lay back on the sparkling granite and closed her eyes.

"Start again from part three, bar ten... one two three..." Hector thrust his bow across the strings as his fingers flew over the neck of the violin. Music filled the small screened porch on the side of the main house where the campers took their meals and practised. Actually, they practised anywhere they could carry their instruments... on the beach, in the pine woods... the meadow; it was the pianists who were housebound, which was why Chloe monopolised the porch. She rested, chin in palm as she watched, her elbow pressing silently into the E above middle C. Early morning sunlight filtered through the stand of spruce to the east of the house, and was absorbed in the reddish varnish of Hector's instrument. She was jealous. His parent spared no expense. The violin glowed. It was old and the resonating chamber was rich with the hoarded memory of past performance. It all came out when Hector played. All she had at home was a crummy upright her father had found second-hand when

she was five. Tuned, but really lousy. 'Have you any idea how much a good piano costs?' he'd say when she asked, begged. Grandmother offered to get her one, but he wouldn't hear of it. How much did their two months in Portugal cost, every year? She couldn't believe that he, the most successful and sought after plastic surgeon east of the Mississippi couldn't afford to get his daughter a suitable piano. When he moved to Montreal from New York, his patients followed, flying up whenever they needed another facelift or tummy-tuck. She gritted her teeth and wished she could run down to the beach for a quick smoke. Even her teacher at home had argued on behalf of a good piano, but the old man was deaf to her entreaties.

Hector's violin was a Matthew Hardie of Matthew Hardie of Edinburgh and C. He called it 'Hardie'. She called her piano, 'the piano'. Characterless things were nameless things. He held the violin under his chin and tore a loose strand off the bow. He looked at her impatiently.

"So play already."

"It's time for breakfast."

"After we do this section again. Its so rocky it would knock the suspension out of a Sherman tank." A sweep of hair fell over his thick eyeglasses. He was already six feet tall, but thin; even thinner lately. He poised the bow and nodded. Chloe shut the piano lid and stashed the music in the bench.

"Chloe..."

"Look, what does it matter if we get it perfect today?"

"Well it's only visitor's day, and your grandmother and cousin will be here, and some folk from Julliard, and God knows who else."

"We'll practice later."

"Swell." He spit the word out of the side of his mouth.

"Honey-Lamb, you can sacrifice your appetite on the alter of St. Cecilia, but I'm famished."

"You're lazy." He stamped his size twelve sneaker, and the porch shook. "You could be really good if you practised. You're just drifting along with your natural talent. You're not lifting a finger to develop it."

"I'd like to lift a finger with some bacon in it."

"Shit. Cut the flip." His face flushed and contorted. He was also right. She was lazy. The breeze, freshening, carried shouts from the beach, and rattled the screen door. His shoulders drooped as he packed the violin away in its plush case. Then he removed his glasses, wiping them on a corner of his shirt. Chloe had never known him to tuck in a shirt. His eyes appeared tiny without glasses. He squinted at her. He had diabetes, and thirty percent vision. Tiny red dots from insulin shots peppered his thigh. Four years ago she couldn't watch him do it, but now the daily inoculations seemed as much a part of Hector as his playing.

"I can't help but notice that you practise with great enthusiasm when Kurt's nearby." He snapped the case shut. Chloe tucked the tail of her teddy blouse into the shorts, pulled the elastic from her pony tail, and let the long

black hair tumble down her back. She knew her best feature. She was too skinny, her nose was too long, her mouth too thin, her forehead too high and her skin too white, but her hair was nice and thick and, as the shampoo commercials said: lustrous. Maybe she could attract Kurt with her hair since her talent at the ivories tended to evaporate when he was close at hand. Ignoring his comment, she bent over to tie her sandals. Hector touched her hair.

"...although what you see in that albino dwarf is beyond me."

"He's not a dwarf."

"He's shorter than you." He removed his hand from her hair and indicated a space in the air at her cheek level where the invisible Kurt stood.

"So, I'm tall. And he's not albino. He's fair."

"Fairer than all those words of wondrous virtues..." "

"He plays fantastically."

"On what basis of comparison?"

"I've heard a lot of pianists."

"Oh yeah. Montreal is a hot-bed of cultural activity."

"... compared to Houston."

"You don't even have a symphony hall."

"Well, they're building one soon. Besides, haven't you heard of Hi-Fi?"

Hector blew from his lower lip, making the fringe of hair on his forehead fly. "I give up. I think I'll swim the channel today"

"Sure. And I'll stand on the breakwater with the oxygen cannister. Let's eat. Have you done the pincushion bit yet?"

"Later. You know, you really could be good if you applied yourself. You have a phenomenal ear, and great hands." He uttered the statement wistfully as he tucked Hardie under his arm. Chloe stared at her long bony fingers with their chewed nails and shrugged.

It was their fourth year at the Manasket Harbour camp. They sat by themselves at a small table in the corner of the dining hall, by a window overlooking the ocean. Over the years it had become understood that this was their table, that they preferred to eat alone, and that there was no point in pressuring them to join the common madness of the long tables in the centre of the room. They had as little truck with the Julliard councillors as was physically possible. (Except lately, Kurt.) Hector was wildly gifted, and Chloe preferred to tap his reserves rather than grovel at the feet of the self-interested New York Mafia. Hector could instinctively feel his way through the subtlest passages, and the staff, somewhat in awe of his abilities, kept their distance as well. The first year, they had been nick-named 'the orphans' because neither set of parents ever visited, and they stayed the full two months. (Most stayed two weeks.) The appellation stuck through an overlapping succession of campers and staff.

Hector toyed with his dry toast and milk. Chloe guiltily

swallowed pancakes and syrup. He was on a strict diet. No wonder he didn't race to meals. He touched the violin case, propped on the windowsill. On the other side of the glass, seagulls circled above the beach, abruptly interrupting their flight to swoop down, ascending as suddenly with sea urchins in their beaks. Empty shells littered the rocks where the gulls dropped them to shatter the spiny bodies. A long strand of hair fell over her face and Hector tucked it behind her ear. She pushed the glass of milk at him. Two months a year, better than a brother. He winked and gulped it down. She patted off his white moustache with her napkin.

Kurt supervised one of the long tables across the room. Chloe's fat tent mate, to his left, threw a muffin over the table at another of the novice campers, Toby, nine. It was said that he'd already done guest appearances with symphony orchestras. Everybody loved a prodigy. Kurt grabbed the girl's hand as the muffin glanced off Toby's cheek, scattering crumbs. No one had heard him play yet. The camp's management offered him private rehearsal space, but he refused to touch his violin, preferring to ride the waves on a float. His father was coming today, though, and rumour had it that he would deign to participate in the concert. Rumour also had it that he was scheduled for Ed Sullivan in October. He brushed the crumbs from his shirt, picked up his milk, and calmly dumped it over the fat girl's head. She shrieked. Kurt stood, knocking his chair over, and hauled them both out onto the porch. Chloe folded her

serviette.

"What do you see in Kurt?" Hector nibbled at the dry toast.

"Brahms. Sometimes he plays after supper and I sit outside on the grass and listen. I've never felt this way. I want to go in to him and, oh, how can I put it? I want to be a part of him, of his music. God, Hector, I'm nuts about him."

"I play Brahms. You never went goofo over me."

Chloe looked at his pale blue eyes, and realised that she usually didn't look beyond the thick glasses. His nose was peeling. Poor redhead. She had some lotion in her trunk. She'd make him put some on later.

"Of course not, silly. That'd be like incest."

"I don't think he plays all that well."

"But he does." She hugged the secret of the private concert, that first night, of her hair standing on end.

"Maybe he's a little more competent than the other jerks."

"Come on. Say it. He's good."

Hector nodded reluctantly and wiggled the heavy frames into a more comfortable position on his nose. "I'll give the guy his due. He's most qualified of all the dumb councillors to enter all those stupid competitions they keep droning on about."

"You think so." Chloe felt a small flutter in her chest. She valued his opinion in regard to music, above anyone else's.

"Yes." Then he added. "But he's still a dwarf."

"Just because you have an overactive pituitary."

They watched as the hall cleared, with a scraping of benches and a clattering of plates. The children were buzzing with excitement. They whooped down the stairs and flew to the beach. The kitchen staff, two girls from the port who tolerated the summer intruders with uncomprehending Yankee shrugs, pushed the trolleys along the empty aisles.

There was a flattened plateau of bedraggled field in front of the house, that had, in a previous existence, been a croquet ground. Pine woods had in the intervening years, sprung up between it, and the shore, and only through one break could one actually see the ocean. The staff were setting up folding wooden chairs amid the splash of Indian paintbrushes, daisies and black eyed Susans that flourished on the lawn.

Hector leaned back on two legs and the chair creaked protest. He was probably Hell on real furniture. Chloe wondered why men could never seem to keep four chair legs on the floor at the same time. Cosimo was the same, and Grandmother was constantly sending chairs out to be re-glued. The screen door slammed against the outer wall and Kurt herded a score of children in identical navy shorts and white tops up the wide wooden staircase. Most were whining that they'd rather be at the beach. Chloe observed that Toby wasn't among them. He probably was at the beach. Their feet rumbled overhead as they passed along the second floor corridor to

the back stairs. She stood up.

"Let's go help the little buggers."

He raised an eyebrow. "You detest the little buggers."

"Come on."

"Forgive me if I suspect your altruistic impulses."

"Forgiven." She twisted her hair into a loose braid and snapped the elastic from her wrist around the end. It took five long years to grow back after Cosimo had cut it. With short hair; even when her hair was up, it drew attention to her neck and she looked like a gazelle. She hated her neck. Hector clocked his tongue, stood, and followed her to the stairs. Children, returning from the attic with chairs balanced on their heads, forced them to press against the wall to avoid being clipped.

"Jeeze," Chloe ducked as a leg swung past her cheek.

"...they've never hauled down this many chairs before. How many are coming this year, anyway?"

"The place is going to be crawling. I overheard the director say that the Julliard twerps invited a mass of people." He paused on the landing, breathing heavily.

"You're flushed. Have you had your shot?"

"Yes, Mother."

"When?"

"When I went to the loo."

"Which time?"

"Chloe, for God's sake..."

"Sorry." She touched his cheek. It was moist with sweat.

Six dormer windows flooded the attic with light. Directly under the slate roof, it was too hot for rehearsal space, although there wasn't although there wasn't another area indoors that was as large. It was used for storage, but on rainy days, groups of students would usurp the space to practice their trios, quartets, quintets, ensembles. It was warm, and dry, and the sound resonated beautifully off the pointed rafters, and from the cluttered corners.

Kurt directed the campers from the centre of the floor, as they scurried around like ants with their burdens. Chloe sidled up to him as Hector shunned the general bustle to sit on an up-ended moosehead in the corner. One small child tripped over a chair as it fell open, becoming entangled in its legs. The child, whom Chloe recalled seeing around with an undersized cello, lay on the floor crying; her ankle stuck in the crossbar. Kurt waved his arms and blew two shrill bursts on his whistle. Hector buried himself in a dusty pile of sheet music, as Chloe extricated the little girl. She looked to Kurt for approval, but he ignored her and helped the child put the chair back on her head. Hector lowered the sheet music and shook his head, simultaneously patting a moose antler. She walked over and sat down beside him.

"How can I make him notice me?" Chloe gazed at the music on his lap. Something called 'Bohemia', 'as performed by José Collins in Maid of the Mountains'. She supposed the picture of the woman in the strange costume with a basket of apples on her head was José Collins. "You'd think I was

invisible."

"I know." He put his arm around her shoulder and squeezed.

"Have you ever been crazy about someone who simply ignored you?"

"Yup."

"What did you do about it?"

"Nuttin'." With his great big hand, he cleared some dust from Jose Collins' face.

"Okay. Let's get moving. We haven't got all day. You two," Kurt motioned to Chloe and Hector. "There are more chairs in that cupboard over there. Get them out."

"We're seniors.... we don't have to do that crap..."

Chloe jabbed him in the ribs with her elbow, and smiled across the room. Hector slowly drew himself up to his full height and stuck his jaw out.

"So, Kurt...I hear you're passing up Moscow this year."

Kurt glared and returned his attention to the children. Chloe couldn't help but giggle as she pulled Hector's arm.

The cupboard was on the inside wall of the hexagonal turret. Four windowed walls faced east. Dust motes flurried in the glare, and she recognised a dry wood smell, peculiar to attics. The slope of the roof was so low, Hector had to stoop. One could see over the pines to the second beach. The mist had burned off. A myriad of whitecaps spun over the deep blue water. Two sailboats were tacking out the channel.

The one in the lead, already at the mouth of the breakwater, was unfurling a striped spinnaker. Hector pulled her braid.

"Concentrate, girl."

"Sorry. I'm restless."

"Nonsense. You'd just rather be somewhere else. As long as I've known you, most of the time you behave as though you'd rather be somewhere else."

"Do I?"

"It's very disconcerting."

Chloe frowned. Was it true? Well, she wasn't going to think about it now. She shrugged, and turned her attention to the little door. It was warped and distended with damp. She pulled at the brass latch. It was green with age. The chalky paint on the tongue and grove boards rubbed off on her fingers. The hinges were thick with it. She tugged. It resisted opening. The wall was as likely to give way as the door was to open. Hector's freckled arm brushed hers as he reached over to help. They yanked at the catch together. She fell against him as it gave with a crash. His arms encircled her.

"What's that?" Chloe peered into the darkness. Just visible were the outlines of chairs and beach umbrellas, long abandoned and coated with dirt. The ventilation space probably ran the length of the attic. A fungal softness darkened the rafters along the roof planking. Hector suddenly pushed her into the stuffy storage area and pinned her against a beam. Before she could think, he was kissing her

face and groping at her blouse with his huge hands. He grasped her little bosom. She pushed at his chest and lost her footing on one of the umbrella stems. Throwing out an arm to prevent a fall, her hand plunged into a sleeping bat colony. She recoiled at the unexpected warmth and movement. They flustered through the confined space with a squeaking flurry of wings, a swirling mass moving into the daylight of the larger attic. Hector threw himself down into the grime and bat droppings, hands over his flaming hair as Chloe dashed out with the frenzied little beasts. Laughing, she sank beside the moosehead and watched as they whirled through the air like so much charred paper. Chairs clattered to the floor as children shrieked, bats shrieked, and Kurt helplessly stood his ground in the middle of the floor, blowing his whistle, his T-shirt pulled over his head.

Chloe picked up José Collins and ran down the stairs with it clutched to her hair as though she were escaping the rain. Once outside, she collapsed onto one of the chairs on the trampled lawn. One blazing wildflower poked out from under her foot. She plucked it from its stem and held it between thumb and forefinger. Hector had tried to kiss her. If she only felt the same way about him, wouldn't everything be simple? Chloe tore the petals off the flower. Orange pollen stained her fingers. What was she going to do about Hector. He was one of the few constants in her life, and she didn't want anything jeopardizing that. Shrill cries still poured from the upper windows, and bats, terrified, not

knowing where to go; into the chaos or into the light.

Why did the visitors bother dressing up? It was, after all, camp. She couldn't imagine some of those dresses on an outhouse john. Ladies in Jackie Kennedy pillbox hats better left with Jackie Kennedy, sank their spike heels into the dry soil. Most of the men sported crested blazers, open necked shirts with ascots, and yachting caps. To be fair, there were several spanking clean yachts moored in the cove, but she spotted far more captains than boats.

Chloe leaned against a tree and rolled spruce gum between her fingers. Kurt was standing at a distance. He saw her and walked in her direction. The blood raced to her face. Like the other girls, she had changed into a dress, and she had taken particular care to look nice. It was a simple white sundress with thin straps and a gathered skirt. She knew it suited her, and had tied a white ribbon to match around her head. Her hair was down, hiding her long, awkward neck. She smiled and stared at her feet.

"What the heck were you doing up there to scare all those bats?" He had a fresh scratch on his cheek, and she hoped it wasn't from a bat. She's seen a program on T.V. about bats carrying rabies. She shrugged.

"Nothing. Just getting the chairs, like you asked. I guess they didn't want to be disturbed."

He grunted.

"Have you got time later to hear a piece I've been

working on?"

"Are you kidding?" He grimaced. "Do you think there's going to be any time today for that?"

"Oh. I guess not," Stupid, stupid, stupid. She could feel her face growing hotter. "Tomorrow?"

"I'm already taking four people tomorrow." He was staring into the visitors and her chest tightened.

"The day after...?" she pleaded.

"We'll see." He had begun to walk away, in the direction of a short portly man with greying temples and a pencil moustache. Something about him reminded Chloe of her father. Probably the three piece suit. The heavy man laughed and patted Kurt on the arm. Chloe was glad her parents never appeared on visitor's day. If they ever came to the camp, it would somehow spoil it for her. She imagined how it would be, with them charming everyone with their perfect manners, and witty conversation. Not really witty, she thought. You could never really remember what had been said afterward. It just sounded clever at the time. He would be tight-collared, red-faced, and she, with her eternally young and ever tighter skin would be in a figure flattering sheath and practical flats.

Chloe searched through the crowd. More cars were arriving every minute. She had never seen so many guests on visitor's day. Grandmother and Cosimo should have appeared. She tried to spot one of Grandmother's outrageous get-ups. One year she made a startling entrance in a filmy purple

robe à la Isadora Duncan. Cosimo always wore shorts. Short short shorts. (Chloe suspected he was vain about his legs), and sandals, an open shirt, and a floppy planter's hat. Grandmother carried a paper parasol with painted flowers. They should have been here by now. Where were they?

Hector sat, Hardie wedged under his chin, cross-legged on the grass to the left of the porch that doubled as a stage for the concerts. It was twelve feet deep and ran the length of the house. He was displaying uncharacteristic nerves, plucking the strings, tightening the pegs, and he had been to the john three times in the half hour. He played a few chords of 'The Four Seasons' to check the pitch. There was a sudden lull in the chatter of the guests. The camp director stood in front of the one decent piano in the place; an appallingly ancient Broadwood. He raised his hands as the audience shuffled to their seats, small campers in white sandwiched between parents and friends. Chloe craned to see the parking lot at the rear of the house, to catch a glimpse of a rented limo, but a stillness of buzzing insects came from the rows of cars, glinting in the midday sun. Where were they? Hector nudged her arm and pointed out the new boy, Toby, leaning nonchalantly against a pillar at the top of the steps. He was wearing his usual ratty jean shorts, a frayed T-shirt, and his curly hair flew off every which way. He had, however, washed his hands. The demarkation line between the dusty grey skin and the pink lay a few inches above his wrist.

"What?" Chloe failed to note anything different about the child.

"Look at his violin." He clutched her arm so hard, she had to shake it free to restore circulation. She looked.

"What about it? A violin is a violin is a..."

"Cremonese." She recognised the quality in his voice... the catch on the second syllable. She said 'Bosendorfer' much the same way.

"Stop drooling. You'll make Hardie jealous."

He shook his head in disbelief: The supervisor was making the introduction as an expression of utter boredom played on Toby's face. He'd heard all the superlatives before. He casually sauntered over to the music stand. Sunlight penetrated the gingerbread trim onto the dappled porch, and Chloe noticed the bruises and bandaids over his arms and legs. As well as body surfing, Toby had embraced as his own the national sport of baseball, with a special fondness for sliding into base. He ignored the music on the stand, instead, swinging his skinny legs over the skirt of the porch. Paying no attention to the audience, he launched into a piece by Paganini. She recognised it because Hector had been labouring over it for ages, and had thus far achieved mere journeyman's competence. The arm and bow moved as one, and he swayed ever so slightly as he played. Hector was speechless. The music thrust over the visitors into the pine woods. High overhead, a gull banked in the cloudless sky, gliding on the sound. The audience was dead silent, and as the final chord died, Toby jumped off the porch and

along the path to the right, through the trees. He swung the bow like a walking stick. A shock wave of applause struck his back as he disappeared into the woods. The dismayed supervisor shook his head and came forward to announce the next performance.

It was hot, and the visitors were growing fidgety. The performances had been long and many. Chloe surveyed the bobbing heads for two familiar ones she might have missed. The piano bench was still warm from the councillor who had played the Beethoven sonata. The whole thing. All three movements. Hector stared down the audience, and after some coughs and murmurs there was silence. He was good at that. Something about his mouth made people pay attention. He poised his bow, nodded and they began the Debussy duet. Chloe's eyes kept straying to the crowd. Faces and faces. Toby had returned and was sitting with a harried looking man in rumpled seersucker. The child was reading a comic book. Across the aisle, Kurt's arm draped over the shoulder of the girl councillor who was up to play after them. The stops of her flute caught the sun. Did she ever put it away? With a shock, she realized they had completed the first section without her having been aware of playing at all. Hector glared. She tried to concentrate on the music, but three gulls, wheeling and crying in the deep sky, distracted her.

Where were they?

Hector shut Hardie away and brushed a smudge of dirt from his white pants. "Well, that was an experience."

"What?"

"What?" He slapped his thigh angrily. "What? That. I don't know what to call what you were doing. It wasn't music."

"I'm sorry."

"Where were you? I've never heard you give such a wooden performance."

She shrugged, and immediately regretted the casual gesture. Hector wasn't simply angry, he was embarrassed. There were important people in the audience, and he could have done a solo. He should have done a solo. Now no one would come up to him after the concert and shake his hand. Instead, he would merely be the young man who had the misfortune to be paired with the blundering idiot at the piano. Poor Hector.

"I was worried about Cos and Gran."

He grumbled and adjusted his glasses. She felt like a crud, dragging out the one excuse he would understand, but it was the truth. He stood and dumped the violin in Chloe's lap.

"I gotta pee. Watch Hardie." He slumped around the back of the house, rubbing his eyes. She'd never seen him so tired. Maybe it was disappointment.

The girl councillor arranged her music on the stand. Kurt accompanied. Chloe envied the hand brushing his as she handed him the sheet music, an intimate, easy gesture.

Chloe compulsively snapped the catch on the violin case. The flautist had thick ankles and greasy skin. She glistened with sweat. Kurt nodded and they struck the first chord in unison. Practise evidently made perfect. They were very good together. Chloe grabbed Hardie and strode conspicuously toward the beach. If the waves were big enough, and loud enough, she wouldn't hear anything.

"Here's your violin." She lifted it from the sand. Hector sat beside her on the rock and laid it across his knees. There were dark circles under his eyes. Chloe wanted to suggest he take a nap, but some instinct told her he would be insulted if she did. Muffled sounds from the garden party came over the trees with the wind. Everyone else was there, excepting Toby's father, who stood alone on the beach and watched as the child paddled his air mattress past the line of breakers, riding in with gleeful yelps. The man hiked up his seersucker pants and sat on a log, polished and bleached from years of exposure, and snuggled his glass of punch in the sand. Chloe wondered where the mother was; if there was a mother. It was her observation that the majority of children at Manasket Harbour had either an 'unsatisfactory home environment' (she loved that phrase; it said so little and suggested so much), or were such distinct oddballs that their parents were only too relieved to commit them to the questionable influence of the camp for a week or two; a month or two. Hector touched her arm.

"Sorry I snapped at you. Look, they're probably stuck somewhere with a flat or something. They'll turn up. They always do."

"Yeah. I suppose."

Toby rolled off the raft and ran back into the water, leaping over the waves, the float bouncing behind him. He waved at his father, who waved back, a tired, bored wave. Hector handed Chloe a plain brown paper bag.

"Oh..." She touched the shiny bag and kissed him on the cheek. Her parents hadn't even sent anything this year.

"So open it."

"I want to guess."

"Groan."

"Ah... 'Fanny Hill'?"

"No."

"'Lady Chatterly's Lover'?"

"Do you think I'm out to corrupt Canada's youth?"

"All right... Ah...notepaper?"

"Now she thinks I'm boring..."

"Ah..."

"Open it, for God's sake."

She tilted the bag and two packs of Lucky Strike slid to the sand, and some music. Ravel's 'Le Tombeau de Couperin'. Not even a duet. A real present.

"I assume you're running low about now, considering the number of times you run off to the breakwater. That is where you hide them, isn't it?" He picked up the cigarettes and put them back in the bag. "Any-hoo, maybe now you'll do

some practising."

"Yes." She flipped the pages.

"And.. I don't know if this is a good time to mention it..."

Chloe stiffened. Please, please, don't let him mention the incident in the attic. If they just ignored it, they could pretend it never happened.

"... but when you get home, why don't you change teachers."

Phew. So that was that. "I'll think about it. Let's go over to the jetty and break these open." She tapped the bag.

"God. You're so indifferent, it makes me furious."

"Well, don't get into a snit. I can't just say, 'Yes, I'll get a new piano teacher.' You don't know my parents. I have to go through more red tape to get my way..."

"If it was important to you, you'd walk over hot coals to get your way. I can't stand to see talent wasted." His knuckles whitened. Chloe lay back on the warm rock. Her head fitted neatly into a small depression, and she pulled a tiny pink crab's claw from her hair. The sun blazed white. "I don't even know if I want a career in music. For all I know, I'll get married and have eight kids."

"Midget albinos?"

She ignored him and tracked a gull until it dropped behind the point. "Anyway, there's plenty of time to decide."

"No, there isn't. We joke about the councillors, but they know how tough it is to go pro. The auditions, the competitions, practising, practising..."

She sat bolt upright with her hands over her ears.

"Uncle... uncle."

"You have so much. You're talented and healthy..."

"So... You're talented and healthy too."

He removed his glasses and squinted at her. She could've bit her tongue. She didn't think she'd ever felt as tired as he looked.

"I'll bet they find a cure in a year or two. They do kidney transplants... maybe they'll do pancreas transplants." After she'd become friendly with Hector, Chloe had read a book for children, called 'You and Your Diabetes', and it had depressed her so much that she was determined a cure had to be found. Whenever she saw an item in the newspaper, relating to the disease, she dutifully clipped it out and posted it to Houston. She refused to consider the alternative to a solution.

"Even if I had an identical twin, he might need his. God in all his wisdom, saw fit to give us but one pancreas." His mouth screwed up and she knew he was chewing the inside of his cheek. "Anyway, I might not need insulin. I read in a journal that in some cases, it can be controlled by diet."

"Yeah?" This hadn't made it to the back pages of the paper.

"It's all in how the body metabolises sugar. You control the intake, and... voilà!" He put his glasses on again. The air mattress drifted back and forth in the shallows as Toby did crazy legs, regularly tripping himself up and

collapsing in the dying waves. A garland of kelp was wrapped around his head. The father had laid the wrinkled jacket over a branch of the log. He shaded his eyes as he patiently witnessed Toby's antics.

"And I'll lead a normal life."

"And swim the channel."

"... and swim the channel." He nodded emphatically.

Toby froze in mid-cavort, yanked the growth from his hair, spun around, and let it fly. The seaweed dropped, and skidded across the sand to Chloe's feet. A peel of laughter rang out as she saluted him, and he dove into an oncoming wave.

It was six. Most of the guests had departed. Stragglers filed along the beach path, trailing damp towels and picnic hampers. Still no word from Grandmother or Cosimo. The fat girl rocked violently on her cot, curled into a tight little ball, because her mother had left. The squeak of the springs grated on Chloe's nerves. She tried to read a book, but soon gave up and threw it to the foot of the bed. Maybe Cosimo would bring some novels. All they had at the camp were old bound copies of 'The Boy's Annual.' She deduced that it had not always been a music camp. Because of the party, they weren't serving much of a supper, but there would be soup and rolls. She exchanged the white pleated skirt for shorts. Watching Kurt make cow eyes at the girl with piano legs was better than listening to the fat girl moan. Maybe he liked her because he felt comfortable around piano legs.

#

The dining room was half empty. Greenish chicken noodle soup simmered on a hot plate next to a basket of rolls.

'Serve yourself time'. She balanced two buns on the edge of the saucer and negotiated the benches. Hector wasn't there.

She sat opposite his empty chair. Was he angry with her?

Tomorrow she'd cooperate with him and practise the Hayden

until her hands bled. Children scattered around the hall

were still wired from the day's excitement. More buns were flying through the air than were being eaten. The two counsellors

present turned a blind eye. Chloe rolled the soft bread into balls and plopped them into the tepid broth. On the lawn,

chairs were folded and stacked, the ground, pocked and

trampled. Gulls picked over the grass for crusts. Every minute

or so, a squabble would break out when two birds attacked the same scrap. So lovely airborne, and so gross on the ground.

Toby suddenly ran down the path from the trees, and the gulls thronged upward in a mustering of black tipped wings. The door slammed and he dashed straight to her table, panting.

A new bandaid striped his cheek. She clutched the table as he caught his breath.

"I've been looking all over for you. Your friend..."

"...Hector?"

"He's in the infirmary."

"What happened?"

"His bunk mate thought he was sleeping, and tried to wake him for dinner... and he wouldn't wake up." He touched her arm. There was concern in his soft brown eyes.

"Don't worry. He's okay now. He wants to see you."

She mouthed thanks and stood. Toby followed her and waited on the steps as she ran across the lawn. He shouted after her.

"Tell him he can use my violin if he wants...and we can do some duets... Tell him."

Hector was sitting up in bed. The nurse looked up from the corner as Chloe entered. The infirmary and nurse's quarters occupied the former guest cottage that had once been within sight of the main house, but was now buried deep in the woods. He smiled and raised his arm from the sheet. The other was taped to a board. An I.V. dripped slowly, regularly, through a plastic tube. Chloe sat on the edge of the mattress and held his hand. He grasped it weakly.

"Only five minutes, now. He needs to rest." The nurse returned her attention to the glossy magazine, and continued to nibble at the diminishing stack of petits fours left over from the party. Chloe had never seen her before. Maybe she hated music and sun. She looked pale enough. Hector made a face. The nurse had put a great blob of cream on his nose and he looked sweet and silly.

"You great booby. What happened?"

He grinned sheepishly. The pale eyes were a washed-out blue, like an old person's. "The diet... she don't work so good."

"You didn't take your insulin?" She took a second notice

of the clear substance flowing into his vein. "You stupid asshole. How long?"

"What a disgusting expression. Do all Montrealers use it?"

"How long?"

"Four days."

"You jerk. You twit." Chloe lowered her voice and indicated the nurse with a twitch of her head. "Why didn't she catch on?"

"I shot the insulin into the can. "

"Really swift."

"Well, the jig's up. She confiscated my supply and I have to come here from now on. Miss Nightingale over there's going to jab me." He closed his eyes and sank into the pillow with a sigh. Too tall for the bed, he squirmed and tugged at the cover, then pushed his feet out the end. "I just want to be normal." It was a whispered plaint. Chloe bent over and kissed his fingers, one by one. The nurse wiped her mouth and put down the magazine.

"You'd better go. You can come back tomorrow morning."

"Toby wants to play duets with you. He said you could use his violin."

He was asleep. She brushed a whisp of red hair from his forehead. On the table beside his glasses lay Hardie, the case open. Hector was dreaming. The fingers of his left hand were positioning automatically on an unseen Cremonese neck.

The surf in the cove was stilled to a placid lapping.

The wind dropped around four most days. Some councillors

Were swimming. Chloe walked around the rocky headland, over the small beach, and along the inner boulders of the breakwater. As though stabbed by giant forks, the ridges and grooves of the quarry cuts were defined by greyer shadow in the grey rock. The date 1887 was carved in a boulder on the opposite shore. The sleepy little port upriver used to be one of the chief shipbuilding centres on the east coast. Four masted schooners and clippers. Chloe stubbed her toe on the rusted butt of a mooring pin, obtruding from the stone. Some years, whole sections of the jetty were pounded apart by winter storms. Some, miraculously, held. The date bore testament to this. But were there other dates on other stones, now nestled deep in the channel silt? 1746? 1803? 1856? A tenuous permanence at best. Next year it might be gone; a disconnected link to that gentler time. Seeing it, she could imagine those huge wooden ships, the creaking spars and rippling canvas.

There were no boats in the channel now. Chloe sat on the table rock and investigated her bleeding toe. The rusty metal had torn away the edge of her nail. She lowered her foot into the water and let the current cleanse the wound. Last night, she thought as the low evening sun glared off the smooth channel water, blinding her, everything had been expectation and possibility. The pain in her foot had subsided to a dull throb in the numbing chill. There was no place else she would rather have been. Shit. Shit, shit, shit. The tide was going out, drawn to the open sea. Why did Hector have to love her like that? And where were Granny and Cosimo? Small eddies swirled around the rocks, sucking the energy out of them-

-selves only to reappear seconds later, glassy spirals, ever spinning. Maybe they had rolled off into a ditch.

Her skin was burning. She hiked up her shorts and touched the flaming line. Damn. Well she didn't want to be here now. What could you do when the place you escape to takes on all the aspects of a prison? Where could you go and be in control? The only place she was ever in control was at the piano. She should be at the piano now. Music was pure, uncomplicated. You banged away long enough, and it would come out exactly the way you wanted it to. People didn't. How on earth could you control your life if you couldn't control the people in it?

Galvanised steel rungs starting just below the high water mark climbed the boulders at the end of the far breakwater, where the swells peaked white and the rough open water battled with the smooth current sluicing out the channel. It didn't seem far. The water was cool and lovely. Bottle green. She could do it. Thirty feet. That was all. Thirty lousy feet. She could control the water for thirty lousy feet.

The blouse buttons undid freely, and she peeled off her underwear with the shorts. For one moment, poised on the rock, the breeze prying between her legs, urging her forward, her skin on fire, the granite firm beneath her, she felt as one with the elements.

The water enclosed her with a rush. She tensed automatically against the cold. Breaking to surface, she

realised in a sudden moment of panic, that she was farther along the channel than she had anticipated. Her breaststroke wasn't holding her against the current. The thrust of it pressed into her left side, guiding her seaward. She straightened her body out and began to crawl, kicking frantically, cutting through the swells, deepening her strokes against the force of the tow. She imagined herself swept past the marker buoys. Could she swim around the headland and back to the beach? The water was calmer in the cove. Cut the resistance. Raise the head for air only on the third stroke. Use the current. Swim on a diagonal to the sea wall. The cold was cramping her. Forget the pain. Kick, damn it. There was the metal rung. The surge of the flow was even greater over the tumbled boulders beneath the surface, lining the inner boundary of the jetty. Seaweed brushed her legs. She raised her head and grabbed at the rung as the outgoing tide made a last effort to propel her past the rocks. Her fingers curled around the metal. She hauled a leg up, then the other, and paused for a moment, coughing up water, her arm hooked around the next rung. Salt pricked her skin as the warm air spun about. The channel sparkled benignly in the early evening sun. She felt like a sea creature, washed up on the sun baked rock. Below her, kelp waved where the breakwater fell away to the obscurity of the depths.

"Hey, Orphan!"

Chloe sat in the shelter of the rocks by the wild roses, fluffing the sodden ropes of hair against the faint warm breeze. One knee was bleeding. Kurt approached, brandishing a yellow envelope. Why him? There were eleven other councillors. Why not the one with the bouncing Adam's apple, or the girl clarinetist with the club foot?

"Where have you been?" He was in swim trunks. The sun was shining in his eyes. He shielded them against the light. Oh, why couldn't he love her back? Why?

"Swimming," she mumbled.

"I didn't see you." He stared suspiciously at the bleeding knee.

"I was over there." She pointed to the small sheltered cove bordered by the slip of sand they called Faerie Beach. Maybe that was Ferry Beach, once, but now the lights danced undisturbed on the evening waters, and small noises gave rise to mystery.

"Shouldn't swim alone."

"I like my privacy when I skinny-dip." She picked her smoking cigarette off the rock. She imagined him imagining her, pink, naked and dripping, stepping out of the surf, toward him. It took him a moment to notice the cigarette.

"You're not supposed to smoke."

"I know. It'll stunt my growth. I'm only five nine as it is." Now why did she say that? He indicated only with a twist of lip, that the comment had touched him. Shifting to the other foot, he changed the subject.

"You have a telegram."

She took the envelope, and he waited for her to tear it open. Instead, she stuffed it into the pocket of her shorts.

"Aren't you going to read it?"

"No."

Why did people expect one to tear open a telegram like a maniac, and dissolve into a puddle of emotion? Cosimo always sent telegrams. He loved telegrams. As soon as she had seen the yellow envelope, it had been like a hand-squeeze, a reassurance. She took a drag on the cigarette and butted it into the sand. Then she stared at Kurt, who stared back as though she were a freak of nature. Only a freak of nature would stuff an unopened telegram into her pocket. He walked away with a shrug. Why didn't he want her? Had he glimpsed a pink naked being and all its possibilities? No. Only a person who got telegrams. At camp, people got phonecalls, they got postcards, they got letters; they didn't get telegrams. She sighed at the white head, a receding patch of paleness in the darkening woods, and took the envelope from her pocket. It was loosely sealed, and as she expected, from Cosimo.

CHLOE

STOPPED TO TAKE LEAK BY ROADSIDE IN YOUR
GLORIOUS NORTHERN WOODS AND TRIPPED IN GOPHER
HOLE STOP BROKE ANKLE STOP DOES NO ONE ANSWER
PHONES THERE? SEE YOU TOMORROW STOP WE CAN HAVE

A COMBINATION CAST SIGNING AND BIRTHDAY PARTY
STOP LOVE AND KISSES COSIMO

The sun reddened as it touched the horizon, bleeding across the water. Terns darted over the wet sand with each lick of a barely cresting wave. Pools of shadow mottled the beach. It had been a long bewildering day. Chloe shivered and clutched the telegram to her chest.

* * *

Chloe leaned heavily against the wall outside Dr. Fyfe's office and suppressed the tears that were always so hideously close to the surface. That was the worst thing, to know that by any objective standards, she was out of control, and that every waking moment was spent trying to hide the fact. A nurse accompanied by a burly orderly, rattled past with a medication tray. They paid her scant attention, for which she was grateful. She remembered when she had suffered depressions as a child, she had ardently wished for someone to sweep her up and make it all right, but they never had. In fact, she controlled it so successfully then, that no one had been aware she was depressed at all. Now, when all she wanted to do was crawl into a hole and pull it in after her... Samaritans were popping out of the woodwork. They should investigate the possibility of nice little asylums for depressed children, and oblivious parents for depressed adults. She thought, as she took tentative steps toward her room, that that would work out nicely.

Jane was standing near the elevators by the nurse's station. When it occurred to her, it gave her pleasure to accost any stranger who walked off the lift. She instinctively, or through long experience, understood that people in white did not like to be bothered, and bided her time for the ten and two o'clock influx of visitors.

The nurses kept a tight watch on her. Sometimes she 'wandered' onto the elevator, and on two occasions, had made good her exit. The first time, she stole a coat from the waiting room, and was found, several hours later, weeping over a Sally Lunn in Ogilvy's Tartan Room. The second time, the constable reported that Jane had taken it into her head to lie on the terazzo floor at Windsor station, and count the panes of glass in the ceiling. She kept yelling at the commuters to stop making so much noise. It disturbed her concentration.

Jane spotted Chloe, and cowered against the elevator door, shielding her chest and face with her pudgy hands. Chloe was angry with herself, and even more depressed. She didn't like to think of herself as violent, or that she was the object of someone else's terror... even crazy Jane's. The elevator doors suddenly opened, and the old woman tumbled into the arms of a disembarking crew of interns. Chloe didn't wait to see what effect this attention would have on her, but hurried past, and slipped into the privacy of her own room. She pushed the door, but the pneumatic hinge took for bloody, bloody, bloody ever to close. There was no lock. She pressed her forehead against the cool painted metal of the frame. She wanted to call Cosimo, to talk to Cosimo. Cosimo would know what to say. He would put things in perspective for her... which was odd considering what an extravagant creature he was. He was. He was. Damn him. Cosimo was the touchstone of her existence. Damn him to Hell.

She sank to the warm tiles and clutched at her face. The tears came. Damn him to Hell for dying.

"Chloe...?"

She looked at Laurence's knees. If she hadn't recognised his voice, the crisply pressed pleat in his pants would have given him away. He must have been waiting in the room. He reached into his pocket and withdrew a pristine hankie, which he then offered her. He didn't stoop beside her, which, it seemed to her, would have been the natural pose to adopt, but waited for her to stand. Well, let him wait. Who invited him anyway? She dabbed her eyes and took a small satisfaction that her mascara would stain the fine French linen. She hadn't wanted to take his handkerchief in the first place, but had learned that the quickest way to get through these awkward moments, was to accept the proffered gestures of comfort and get on with it. She blew her nose, and feeling somewhat more controlled, rose to her feet. Laurence stepped back and kept a distance. Perhaps he believed breakdowns were contagious. Why had he come? It wasn't like him to take time off work, and she certainly hadn't encouraged his visits. In fact, for eight years, she had bent over backwards to alienate him entirely.

Laurence turned and walked into the room. She fiddled with her dress and pondered the motivation for his visits. She could read no pity or solicitude, or residual love in his eyes. Then it hit her. Of course. It was curiosity. He stopped by the window and sat on the arm of a chair, surreptitiously

taking in her every movement. She absorbed this revelation with a mixture of resignation and resentment, such as zoo animals might feel could they reason their predicament. But no. That wasn't quite it either. She confronted his sly gaze and he quickly looked away. It was more the morbid curiosity one displays when one views a corpse. That was it. He felt like he had the advantage over her, for the first time since she left him... but the corpse knew better. She might be an emotional wreck, but she was observant, which was more than could ever be said of him. He straightened the signet ring on the pinkie of his right hand, and sat lightly on the edge of the chair arm so as not to wrinkle the light weave silk. His smile was stiff and forced. She blew her nose again, crumpled the expensive hankie in her sweaty hand, and threw it on the bed.

"Why on earth did we ever get married. We never liked each other."

The hankie lay between them like a gauntlet. He paused for a moment, twisting the ring on his finger. His pale eyebrows raised a few centimetres, and his mouth curled.

"You married me for the perks."

"Doesn't explain why you married me."

"You were pleasing to look upon and a delight in bed."

Oh. It was the bed that lay between them like a challenge.

To her recollection, the sex had been rather ordinary. Adam had been more tender, and Sebastian, far, far more adventurous. Sex with Laurence had been energetic and frequent. That

was all.

Chloe twisted the crank at the foot of the bed until the mattress bent to the desired angle, then she sat, cross-legged, like a Buddha. Laurence's eyes rested for a moment on the curve of her calf, then he turned to stare out the window. His hair was recently cut, displaying more grey than usual. He had grown thicker since they parted company. His suits stretched tighter across the shoulder. His tanned neck was creased with white. Why was he just sitting there? Why didn't he say anything?

Then she noticed the plant. Actually, it was more a tree than a plant; an uninhibited growth that occupied a full corner of the room, reaching halfway up the nine-foot wall. A rubber tree? A big Jade tree. How could she not have noticed a thing as presuming as that? The room was overwhelmed with its greenness. A blue and white checked bow adorned the pot.

"Happy birthday." His pupils were dilated from staring into the sunlight, and the eyes, colder and greyer than ever. A shiver passed through her. Mentally, she began to concoct excuses why he shouldn't visit her anymore.

"You brought this?"

"Yes. I thought the room needed a little something."

The handkerchief, the plant, his condescension: why didn't he go away? "Yes... the rain forest." She immediately regretted the archness, but could detect no corresponding wince on his part. He appeared to be thinking of something else.

"It's treated." He idly examined the clear white moons above his immaculate cuticles. Why did she feel affronted by anyone who managed not to demolish their fingernails? She was currently nursing three painful thagnails.

"Treated? Has it been indisposed?" She had already taken an irrational dislike to the tree. Guilt by association. The treatment must have been successful. The plant exhibited no taint of decay, no yellowing of leaf, no puniness of the infested. It was altogether too green and glowing. Perhaps more rubber than rubber tree?

"Ha ha. No. It's a new technique. I have several at the office. The process is similar to embalming."

Chloe shuddered and tried not to listen.

"A special fluid is pumped into the plant, replacing the natural moisture, and although it can no longer photosynthesize, or reproduce, it remains green, and the leaves are guaranteed never to fall."

God, he looked so pleased with himself. Chloe looked more closely at the tree; alive and yet, not quite living. Ornamental. Being with Laurence had been like that. She empathized with the tree. Leaves guaranteed never to fall. It sat greenly in the corner and made her sad. She appreciated the gentle rush and plunk as leaves disattached themselves from branches, unexpectedly, as you were reading or dropping off to sleep. Rush, plunk, and you wondered for a moment if there was an intruder in the house, or if the cat was meandering. Then you realized that the tree was simply shedding. Laurence was still talking.

"All you have to do is dust it once in a while and wash it once a year. Grease buildup."

"Can the fluid be taken out... drained?" She had a hopeful vision of the tree, ressurected: browning, shedding, growing new leaves..."

"No." He grinned, waving his hands like a door to door encyclopaedia salesman. "It's a permanent process. It should remain green indefinitely."

"To embalm: to preserve from oblivion, to make fragrant." What an idiotic musician's memory. Whole phrases, pages of music would stick in her memory after a single glance. She'd never had to copy down a telephone number. Complete passages from books read once would circle her mind when triggered by a key word. Suddenly, fatigue just blanketed her. Her eyes ached from the mere act of seeing. Poor tree preserved from oblivion. No fragrant myrrh. No spices. Formaldehyde? Her head sank into the pillows. Laurence obviously thought her incapable of tending anything alive. He looked so pleased with himself. The perfect gift for a loony. She closed her eyes, and heard Laurence rise, she hoped, to leave. But no. One side of the mattress sank under his weight. His knee brushed her thigh. She shifted over to break contact. He fingered the hair that was pulled to a knot at her neck. She remembered his touch. What nerve. She ignored him in the hope that he'd go away. She wanted to sleep.

"Take your hair down... for me... take it down... down."

He was plucking at her combs. She jerked her head and

opened her eyes. Go away, go away, go away. She scarcely had the energy to speak.

"Go away."

"Do the nurses poke in here much?" His hand dropped to her shoulder and she was sorry that she had unbuttoned the dress. It gave him too much to consider. Laurence was a sensualist whose desires lay close to the surface. It was the conspicuous ways he satisfied those desires that had been the initial attraction. The only attraction. The best restaurants, the best wines, the best hotels, first class travel... the best silk against his skin. He was the only man she had ever heard of who wore tailor-made silk boxer shorts. Maybe he was a latent transvestite. He was pinching her nipple between his thumb and forefinger. The image of him in a peignoir made her giggle, giving her the impetus to repel his wandering lust. He was undoing his shoelaces with his free hand.

"Laurence, you are a pig. Go away."

"What?"

"I had a tiny little breakdown. I didn't loose my mind."

"You don't want to?" He was incredulous. Amazing.

"We haven't slept together in eight years. Why, in the name of God, would I want to now?" So tired so tired so tired. She couldn't keep this up much longer.

"But I'm the only one who's bothered to visit you."

"And you want me to sleep with you to show my gratitude?"

I didn't want visitors. I can't stand being like this. Out of

control. I want privacy. I want peace. I want to go to sleep. I can't handle you now. I don't want to try."

"But I love you." An erection strained against the fine summer weave silk pants that he always wore a trifle too tight anyway. God. Poor Laurence. Why did he still love her? How could he still love her? No. Not love. She was something he had imagined. They all imagined her as something she wasn't, except maybe Cosimo. Oh, Laurence... go away with your lust and your desires and your egocentricity. He had tied his shoe and was trying to compose himself. If she had had the energy, she might have pitied him. Laurence was just Laurence, neither good nor bad, but so tiresome.

The tears were dangerously close. Chloe clenched her fists and took several deep breaths. She didn't want Laurence to see her cry again. He'd probably think it had something to do with him. So Cosimo was dead. People died. He had taken two years to die, she should have been prepared, yet the depression was there every morning with awakening.

Laurence straightened his jacket and nodded stiffly in her direction from the door. "By the way, I meant to tell you that Andrew will be coming by this afternoon. He's made you a present."

She fought the constriction in her throat. "Oh? What did he make?"

"I have no idea. He won't tell me. Your houseboy helped him." He sounded bitter, as though he sensed Andrew's gravitation towards Chloe. It was something she didn't understand herself but refused to analyse because it seemed natural and right. Poor

Laurence. A pneumatic hiss signalled his departure. She gazed at the Jade tree and sobbed like a child.

4

Was it another variation on Murphy's law, that if there was someone you were trying your very hardest to avoid, they just turned up any bloody unlikely place you turned up?

Chloe had been avoiding her musical composition professor for the past six weeks. She hated composition. She couldn't compose worth a damn. It was a required course, and since the commencement of term, she had hidden behind a clipboard at the rear of the class. Then he appeared in the dépanneur where she did her shopping, on her street, at the Sunday afternoon Pro-Musica concert series at Place des Arts, in the stacks at the library, and now, on her flight to New York. It was not possible to maintain a comfortable anonymity after spending two hours in close proximity with someone, especially if that someone was a hyper-friendly over-talkative hippie professor who stared at her thighs the whole time. (What could you wear these days but a mini?) The game was up. He'd ask her to play Tuesday for sure. She insisted on carrying her own bag through the terminus.

Kurt had a student fly in from Idaho, unexpectedly. He couldn't meet her. She hung up the receiver, and checked the coin return for dimes. Adam (as he insisted she call him)

sat at the end of a long row of orange plastic chairs, reminding her oddly of Cosimo; a hand gesture, a turn of the head. Announcements of arrivals and departures echoed over the intercom. His soft curly hair was tied in a loose pony tail with a frayed shoelace. He wore the same faded jeans and army jacket that he wore around campus. Why had professors stopped wearing suits and ties? She felt uneasy in the presence of authority figures who pretended they weren't. But Kurt wasn't coming and she'd have to share a cab. She turned to Adam with a shrug.

"Let's go."

It was her turn to talk. They were separated from the driver by a sliding perforated window. Adam pushed down the drop seat and stretched his long legs.

"So, who do you know in the east eighties? That guy you were expecting?"

"What makes you think it was a guy?"

"Not too many girls called Kurt. Boyfriend?"

"Yeah." He was a little too nosy for her liking. She didn't want to be that familiar.

"Must cost a fortune in plane fares."

"We haven't been lovers that long. This is my first visit." Did she imagine that a frown crossed his face? He drummed his fingers on the seat: long fingers with clean, neatly clipped nails. She had watched, from behind her clipboard, when he demonstrated various compositional forms

on the piano. Although he lacked technique, he played with a joyous fluency that made listening to him a pleasure.

The New York skyline was visible through a bright autumn haze. It had the indistinct colouring of an old tinted postcard, the dyes running into one another. In a few hours, she would be seeing Kurt's place; meeting his friends. Adam whistled faintly through his teeth, lost in himself, a very blissed-out character. No doubt he smoked a good deal. The taxi bounced along. No suspension. He began playing something on his knees, and stopped suddenly to pull a paper and pen from his bag. He tapped out a line of music as efficiently as a telegraph operator, leaving a pathway of messy dashes, then he pushed the paper back in the zippered compartment of his parachute bag. She envied his ability to pluck notes from the air. The little minuet she was working on for his class project was without a doubt, the worst piece of boring, repetitive pianistic drivel ever to offend hearing. If forced to play it before the class, she would die.

"Are you always so quiet?" What could she say to that? He waited for an answer. A fume of diesel exhaust filled the cab as a truck roared past. She'd better ask him something.

"So what are you doing this weekend."

"Well," he paused. "I had planned on following you around. But I guess that's out." This was stated matter-of-factly, comically. He heaved a long mock sigh. "So who does live in the east eighties?"

"My cousin Cosimo."

"I'd like to hear you play sometime."

"You have the power to command."

"I just hate to bother someone who's taken so much trouble to bury herself behind her books. You have a talent for avoiding eye contact. Don't think I haven't noticed." His own eyes were deep and blue and wrinkled at the edges when he smiled. "Are you equally talented at playing the piano?"

"When you hear the piece I'm writing, you'll wish I'd stayed hidden."

"Why?"

"I can't write. I can play, but I simply can't string two notes together to save my life."

He traced the figure eight or the symbol for eternity on his pant leg with his fingernail, appearing to digest her confession.

"So you've been avoiding me because you can't compose."

"Yes."

"And you don't want to come to the front of the class and make a fool of yourself."

"That's right." There. It was out. But she didn't understand the curl at the edge of his lips. Did he think it was funny?

"But you can play?"

"I can play."

He clicked his tongue. The taxi whirled over the bridge grating. On the river below, three sailboats raced past a coal barge, riding darkly and heavily on the water.

They stood on the sidewalk, bags at their feet, facing the three story redstone. It wore a vacant, desolate look; the windows uncurtained and black.

"Well?"

"This is it." It was most certainly it, but she was puzzled. The house didn't feel the same. Adam picked up the bags and they climbed the steps. A warm breeze brushed her legs, too warm even for a sweater. She couldn't remember another October so warm. She tapped the knocker and waited. Adam leaned against the handrail, the marigolds in the windowbox over his shoulder, loud, yellow, overblown. Why hadn't he departed with the cab? Didn't he have better things to do than tag along after her? He wasn't serious, was he? With a sudden scraping of bolts, the door swung open, and there was Cosimo, resplendant in pink overalls and a painter's cap. He swept her up in a fierce bear-hug.

"Chloe, precious girl..." He eyed Adam. "...and you've brought me a present. How thoughtful. What's his name?" He yanked them into the house, through the empty hall, to the vast, empty living room, and plunked himself cross-legged in the centre of the floor. What was he doing? Where were all Grandmother's things? Unfiltered light from the windows defined sharp rectangles on the bare, dusty hardwood. She had wanted it to be the same, and it wasn't. She couldn't feel Grandmother here at all.

"Cosimo... what are you doing? What is all this?"

"First things first... you're forgetting your manners.

The gift... the gift..." Cosimo jerked his head toward Adam.

"Sorry. This is Adam Carothers; my composition professor. We met on the plane. He's leaving."

Cosimo looked up in panic from the paper upon which he was jotting items. It was a very long column. "Oh, no no no no no no. I need him. You have no idea."

Chloe made a face.

"And it's not what you think, you filthy-minded girl. I need all the help I can get. He must stay." He crawled across the floor on his knees and prostrated himself at Adam's feet. "Please, please, please." A ruby glistened in his ear. Chloe sensed the fourteen foot ceiling drop a little and the walls inch in. This Adam was not going to be easy to shake. The Fates and Cosimo were conspiring. Adam was convulsed and nearly toppled backwards as Cosimo clutched his ankles. She turned to the fireplace and touched the waxy lustre of a carved flower. A primrose?

"Cosimo... what are you doing?"

He sprang up and took the centre of the floor.

"Did you know, that according to municipal by-law, you need a permit to wreck your own house?"

"What?"

"It's true. Isn't that incredible?"

"Cosimo..."

"I've been simply plagued with little men in shiny suits." He strode to the next room, and with a flourish, printed the words: WELL TO BASEMENT, on the dining room floor. The thick black letters violated the sweeping grain

of the oak. Chloe glanced around, and observed with the clarity of panic, that there were obese putti on the moldings. They grinned down with malicious little faces. Framed by pale squares where paintings had recently hung were other memos: ATRIUM, with an arrow gliding across the floor to point at a big X, SCULPTURE GARDEN, and another arrow crossing the first to aim out the back window, and one exhorting DEATH TO QUEEN VICTORIA. Adam grinned. He was obviously enjoying himself.

"Looks like a haunt for conceptual vandals."

"Ohhhh, it's going to be fabulous. The walls walls walls are going going going." He patted his pockets. "Where's my marker? I can't think without my marker." He emitted an exasperated little yelp. "My marker..." A hammer dangled from a loop in his overalls. "I've been a closet claustrophobic for too long. They're all descending on me at two... and there's so much to be done... you should see all the crap upstairs." He wrung his hands.

"Cosimo... Cosimo..." Chloe tugged at his sleeve. He didn't seem to notice. "Cosimo... what is going on? Who is coming? What are you doing?"

"What?" His eyes focussed in on her. "Oh... this? Didn't I tell you? I finally found Granny's will. After ransacking every shoebox in the house, it turned up in our safety deposit box. Anyway..." He sat on the radiator and pulled her beside him. Adam lingered tactfully in the other room.

"...she arranged to tie up all her nice money in a granting foundation. I don't think she altogether trusted me, but

what care I? Cosimo Delaney, patron of the arts. Bless her heart. I've always wanted to be wildly generous to sweet talented young things. I think she figured I'd blow the wad if she didn't entail it some way. I am to be director for life with an income for life not to be less than something or another, and not to exceed something or another. And she left me a lovely accountant. His name is Purvis. I haven't figured out if that's a sur or christian name. We argue regularly over expenses and he always ends up writing a cheque. I love him. "

"But the house...?"

"Oh, the house is going to be headquarters... or will be after I rip out the walls." He smiled benignly. "The I.R.S. are still gnashing their teeth... listen..." He leaned out the window, hand to ear. "We're kicking off with a little demolition party... you know... bring your own pickax... this aft." He danced over to the base of the stairs and draped his arm over the newel post, modelled after a Bellini column. "You have to sign a few papers."

"What for?" Chloe gazed with regret at the carved panelling.

"Well, Granny made provisions for you too. You're an assistant director. For signing a few papers a year, you'll receive an income that will, provided you are frugal, enable you to move into a better quality slum. Of course, any time you choose, you can move in with me and live in splendour. I'm leaving the third floor. As is. Actually, I'm turning the linen closet into a kitchen. But there's plenty of room. All

expenses to the foundation, and dear Purvis provides. Say thank you, dear."

"Thank you, dear." Chloe scratched her head. Cosimo slapped the newel post.

"This goes too. I detest mahogany. Stinks of funeral homes. Never, dear cousin, never never ever please, send me to a funeral home. Just cart me down to the Staten Island ferry and dump me in the Hudson. Total cost... what does it cost nowadays? Five or ten cents?"

Adam and Chloe shook their heads.

"No matter. Maybe I'll replace the stairs with a nice aluminium spiral staircase, and a fireman's pole down the centre. Hell... maybe a few firemen. Just love their uniforms. Where's that marker?" He spied it on the floor and sprang, sketching the proposed stairs on the silk wall covering. Ink ran through the fabric, and the completed drawing resembled nothing more than a dark blot. Cosimo stepped back to admire it.

"Well, don't just languish about in my hallway. Come and help me haul furniture. God. What ever happened to cheap labour? I wish I had a slave." He sighed, and bounded up the stairs, three at a time. Chloe faced Adam.

"You don't have to stay. There must be someplace you should be."

"No."

There was a sinking sensation in her chest that must have been reflected on her face. He frowned.

"I'd like to stay. You don't mind, do you?"

She shook her head. It would have been caddish of her to object.

"Oh good. I wouldn't miss this for the world."

From upstairs came a crash and a scream.

"Get your buns up here. There's an armoire on my foot."

"And I'm cheap," added Adam. He threw his jacket over the bannister as he dashed up.

Chloe stared at the oil painting over the mantle of the third floor sitting room. Grandmother, still floating in the water lilies, still smiling. Unfortunately, there were no pictures of Granny as Chloe knew her. Old. She couldn't really connect the young woman in the existing photographs with the person she loved. Chloe imagined that the naked lady in the painting was amused by her thoughts. If Granny were standing beside her, she would say: 'But that is me. I was and will be ever thus.'

She lifted the piano lid and scraped her nails along the wires, causing a muted harp sound. Cosimo told her the piano had been here, in this room, since its purchase seventy years ago. Granny's father had bought and furnished the house as a wedding present. It was almost a sacrilege to move it into her own cramped, gloomy little flat, but Cosimo insisted. She closed the lid and ran her hand over the fine grain of the rosewood. Not even one tiny scratch. No longer would she be able to blame her deficiencies on her piano. Good riddance to the cruddy little upright. If she was lucky, its sale might cover the

cost of shipping this concert size monster. This was the first time in her life she ever had the urge to hug a piano.

Three levels down, Adam and Cosimo were carefully setting things out on the sidewalk. A gilt cheval mirror balanced between them looked as though it were about to drop. Adam gently lowered his end to the ground, stood it upright, (Cosimo checked his reflection) and they skipped back into the house for another load. There was a bizarre effect to the things arranged along the curb, items he wouldn't dream of inflicting on his friends, assuming that they shared his taste. Yellow leaves from fenced trees landed softly on overstuffed chairs, a love seat, the armoire, kitchen oddities, several mahogany plant stands complete with ferns, and an entire set of Victorian bathroom fixtures. Chloe had half a mind to put dibs on the huge footed bathtub. A neighbourhood cat daintily tight-roped along its rim. Granny would approve. She would look at all her possessions tumbled beside the road, and laugh.

A young couple paused to admire the furniture as Adam and Cosimo staggered down the front steps with the ends of a four-poster bed. Wood scraped along the railing. Cosimo flung his arm across the woman's shoulder and a moment later the couple, grinning, continued along the street with the love seat between them. Many homes were going to be enriched by Cosimo's jetsam. A gust blew over one of the plant stands. The cat leapt onto the street. It was eleven o'clock. Time to go to Kurt's.

#

Chloe examined the concert programme. 'KURT WELLS-DEBUT'. She glanced up at Kurt. Whose smart idea was that? What was wrong with Welovski? No worse than Horowitz. The selection was pretty standard. Some Schumann, Brahms, Chopin; nothing provocative. The entire second half of the concert was devoted to Beethoven's 'Appassionata'. A real rabble rouser. Ought to be good for at least two encores. A 'safe' programme. Most of the audience could probably hum along. She suppressed a feeling of disappointment and kissed his silky fine hair. He probably had no say in it. Someone probably chose the pieces for him.

"I was sorry to read about your grandmother."

"Thank you for calling. It meant a lot to me."

"I caught the name Delaney in the paper. They did a little spread on her. I didn't know you were one of those Delaneys."

"Those Delaneys??"

"You know... robber baron type Delaneys. It said she was worth millions."

"She was an O'Brian. The Delaneys cut her off without a cent."

"Why?"

"It's a long story."

He kissed her neck. The smell of fish rose from the store downstairs. A door slammed.

#

Kurt sat at the piano. It commanded the small room: a Yamaha concert grand, as sleek and black and shiny as a formula one racing car. She had heard they were making them, but this was the first she had seen. In the remaining space was an old leather couch, also black, a roll-top desk crowded with papers, and a bookcase. She was impressed by the spotlessness of the place. Kurt had never struck her as being the domestic type. It was an encouraging virtue. The walls displayed posters announcing various piano competitions. Reams of music lay tidily stacked under the piano, along the walls, and in the shiny grate of the unused fireplace. A low pile grey broadloom carpeted the floor. Only the windows betrayed a less than absolute commitment to cleanliness. They were thick with grime. A cockroach crawled lazily along a slat of the Venetian blind. If she lived here, she'd do something about it, get rid of them and put up curtains, or hanging plants — the place needed a touch of life: asparagus ferns, grape ivy, wandering jew, something growing.

Kurt ran through the entire sequence of Chopin's Opus 10 Etudes, pausing only to wipe his hands. It was a triumph for mathematical precision, and the music suffered. The piano shook as his fingers pressed into the keys, his head glowing in the light of the tensor lamp. What was he doing? His timing and phrasing were flawless, but it was nothing more than an exact translation of the page to the air. No spirit. Sweat darkened his shirt back. By the Revolutionary

Etude', Chloe's muscles ached for the tension in his. He stood and bowed, fists clenched. She smiled weakly.

"Are you afraid?" She wanted to look away as she asked the question. Kurt pointed to the poster over the fireplace. It was for the most recent Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow.

"I was to have been there. I was booked for a whole round of European competitions this past summer. Aha. I can see you asking yourself... then why was he at camp teaching a bunch of snotty brats keyboard technique.' Why indeed? Well, I cancelled out. Never before did shit hit fan quite like that. If you win a few, it makes it easy for them to publicize your debut... you know... winner of the 1967 Saltzbourg festival... and all that. It makes them look good. But I canned out, and my best friend went. He placed in Moscow. It is generally conceded that I am the better pianist." He snapped his fingers at the poster. "So they had nothing to put in the advertisements. Tickets were sent to the critics; but I don't suppose they'll come. If I'm lucky, the odd person will walk in off the street, compelled by the incredible cheapness of the ticket."

"You didn't answer my question."

"Oh yes. Am I afraid? What do you think?"

"Do you remember Hector?"

"No."

"He was the tall red-haired boy at camp, five years ago."

"I don't remember. What does he have to do with the price of eggs?"

"Well, he plays third violin with the Chicago Symphony, and he told me that the first few times he played before an audience..."

"That's different. Playing with an orchestra is different. Tell me how he feels when he solos."

"But..."

"This is different." He screamed. "You don't know what it's like being up there all alone, with everyone staring, waiting for you to screw up."

"They're not. They're waiting to be entertained. You're very gifted. You have nothing to worry about. Nothing. Nothing."

"Sure. Well, if I screw up tonight, I may as well go to Sheboygan and tune pianos. Can't cancel this one."

His face was crimson. Chloe hugged her knees and rocked.

He produced a lunch of lox, bagels, and cream cheese after running down to the fish store-cum deli. There was plenty of beer. Chloe learned the apartment was clean because Kurt gave a little boy lessons in exchange for his mother's services as a char. She didn't do windows, but promised, that if he managed to get the child through Czerny, book one, that would be his bonus. It had been two years. The kid had ten thumbs. They ate on a T.V. tray and listened to the mumble of customers below.

The ACE CLOTHING RENTAL bag lay on the arm of the couch.

Kurt slipped the formal jacket over his striped shirt. It didn't fit. The tails hung below the backs of his knees. He looked ten years old. She buried her face in the satin lapels.

There were more competition posters on the bedroom walls.

"Are you safe?" He slid his hand under her blouse to unhook the bra. His fingers were hot. He pressed her down on the bed and kissed her neck and chest, then suddenly stopped; turned away. She heard the rubbery snap of the inevitable condom and wondered why it felt like the first time. God knows they had spent the entire summer screwing like bunnies in the woods, by the long sharp grass of the dunes near Faerie Beach, whispers and giggles indistinct in the sound of the waves. Because this wasn't neutral ground? He threw his socks on the chair, held her arms and thrust his tongue into her mouth. The light from the window was somewhat obscure, even at noon. She closed her eyes and tried to pretend they were still at camp.

There was neither television nor stereo. Was the only music he listened to the music he played? Then it occurred to Chloe that not once in the summer had he heard her play. When, after several years absence he had returned to Manasket Harbour as the camp musical coordinator, he had used her

as a practise critic, and when her duties as councillor were not required, she had spent hours listening to him play the same pieces, over and over on the little screened porch. Why didn't he listen to anyone else? To her? Kurt pushed her long hair and nibbled her ear as they bathed in the still light of early afternoon. Come to think of it, he hadn't heard her play since she was fifteen and he hadn't liked her then.

"I spent the first four years of my life in a Red Cross camp in Switzerland. I think my grandmother got me there. No one is sure. My parents were shipped places as factory labour, and ended up at Auschwitz. They survived but didn't find me 'til 1947. I think they thought I was dead. The authorities thought they were dead, and were in the process of finding me new parents. Then they ran into a friend of my grandmothers who told them to try this place. They spoke Polish and German, and I spoke French. We came here and became American together. We pretended that the past had nothing to do with our lives, but for years we all woke up at night, screaming. Whenever they went out at night, I didn't believe they would ever come back, and I would lie on their bed crying. When they got home, they'd carry me to bed, and I'd listen to them whispering in Polish, and wonder what they were saying. They wanted me to play the piano. My mother used to play."

"Will they be there tonight?"

"No." He sat away from her on the edge of the bed. She stared at his beautiful pale skin, afraid to touch.

"Beer?"

"Sure." Chloe curled up on the couch wrapped in a bedsheet. He appeared from the kitchen with two tins.

"Sorry. No clean glasses."

"I prefer the tin." She lied. She liked bottles, she didn't prefer tins. He handed her the beer and sat down.

"So what shall we do this afternoon?"

"I have to rehearse. Steinway sent this lemon over, and it has an action that would sprain a gorilla's wrist."

"Oh." The beer was warm and bitter. "Could I go too?"

"I'd rather not. There'll be some people there. You'd only make me more nervous." He pulled the sheet down and licked the rim of her nipple. "You have lovely tits. Like ripe fruit." He took her beer and put it on the floor. "Why don't you move to New York?"

"Between you me and the fish, I think we'd be a little cramped," she joked.

"So we'll move into a bigger place." She couldn't see his face. It was nestled between her breasts. Was this what he wanted? Then he had to love her too. He had to. She stroked his back and wondered if she should bother shipping the piano to Montreal. Was it hard to find cheap apartments in New York?

"After all, you're rolling in it now." He placed his hand between her legs and stroked the inside of her thighs. She wanted to strike him. She wanted to scream. Instead all she said was: "No, I'm not."

"Come on. The paper said..."

"What the paper didn't say is that she tied it all up in a granting foundation to be administered by my cousin."

The jangle of a cash register rang through the floor. She stared at Kurt. He controlled his expression well, but his shoulders sagged. How could she have been so stupid? Not so much as a fare-thee-well at the end of camp, and no letters, but the day after Grandmother died, red roses followed by a week of phone calls. Invitations to visit. He shrugged. She examined the blinds to see if the cockroach was still there. It was, slowly progressing to the end of the slat.

"Well I guess we could manage here." He said lamely.

"I'll think about it. Have you got a cigarette? No. Of course not. Where's my purse?" She found it on the floor beside the couch, and quickly lit herself a cigarette. Nicotine, the great calmer. She wanted to be alone.

"Why don't you go to your rehearsal."

"They're holding a comp for you at the box office."

"Thanks." She had trouble getting the word past her teeth. She inhaled deeply, feeling unpleasantly damp between the legs; something she had never minded in a sleeping bag by the ocean.

"Wait for me in the lobby afterwards. Some friends are giving me a party."

She exhaled slowly and didn't answer.

He left. She dressed. The programme; many programmes lay on the messy desk. KURT WELLS-DEBUT-OCTOBER 29th, 8 PM.

Plain white on a black ground. A line drawing of a pair of hands. Chloe tore one in half. The others stared back at her. KURT WELLS KURT WELLS KURT WELLS. Did he really love her? It couldn't be the money. He hadn't known about that. The summer meant something. It proved something. That was real, wasn't it? Her heart aching, she carefully tore another programme, and another, and another. Then she snatched up the rest of the pile and hurled it at the Moscow poster over the mantle. It struck the prop holding the piano lid open, and it splintered as the heavy wood crashed down. The jarred wires vibrated and hummed. Someone in the store below shouted and pounded on the ceiling. Chloe dropped her hands to her side and watched as the cockroach finally reached the end of the blind. Perhaps it was deaf. Perhaps it was accustomed to loud noises. A jaded cockroach. She turned off the light, picked up her things, and left.

Larry, the structural engineer, was among the first to arrive. He pinned up a selection of blueprints, and slashed large red X's on doomed walls with chalk. A dumpster was stationed outside the front door, and guests compelled to gain entry by hauling themselves under the brass handrail. Chloe felt silly in purple overalls until she saw what everyone else was wearing. Adam had exchanged his jeans for a pale blue pair. New. Cosimo could have picked them to match his eyes. Already an easy familiarity was struck between the two men. Was Adam gay? The notion bothered her.

His long fingers curled over the radiator grill. Cosimo whispered something in his ear. They laughed. Then Cosimo slid across the floor through the dust.

"All this is going going going. Pure white Pirelli flooring. An under layer of dense foam. A great rubber carpet. Can't you see everyone springing, dancing, leaping?"

He performed a token bounce. It was written on a condemned wall: WHITE PIRELLI FLOORING.

The destruction commenced. Tools Cosimo had artfully displayed on trestle tables had been grabbed up and the happy smacks of hammers echoed throughout. Cosimo was making tentative jabs at the plaster with a crowbar.

"Christ, this is hard. What is this shit?" A large chunk dangled from fine threads, refusing to fall.

"Horsehair." Larry ambled over and poked the offending mass with his finger. "Used to be common practise, at least when horses were common, to mix it in with the plaster. Strength and adhesion. Got any masks? This stuff'll make you sick."

Cosimo groaned. A sledge hammer lay on the floor. He took it up, whacked at the wall, and a yard square section of laths came clean with a shudder. Then he dropped the tool and stomped off. The air was a haze of plaster dust. Chloe covered her mouth with a Kleenex. A minute later, Adam appeared with a carton of disposable surgical masks. Cosimo wasn't as flakey as she thought. He dumped the box on a

trestle table and gazed over to where she was standing guard by the mantle. Already the intricate carving was powdered white. So was he. With the pony tail he looked pure Louis Seize.

"What are you doing?" He asked.

"Seeing that this is dismantled properly. I'm keeping it.

Larry said he'd help." She blew some dust from the overmantle.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know. Store it until I have a fireplace, I guess."

Adam took the magic marker that was sitting on the windowsill, and in a fair imitation of Cosimo's bold block lettering, printed: TOUCH THIS FIREPLACE AND YOU DIE, on the walls to the right and left. "That should hold off the crowbar crew. Fearless leader wants all the food in the large room on the third floor. Give me a hand?"

She nodded as Larry appeared with two helpers in grey MACY'S coveralls, proceeding to direct the dismantling. Adam led her to the basement where Cosimo was stacking trays in the lazy butler. Splintering and cracking could be heard upstairs. She cringed and ran into the garden. The air was heavy with the scent of late roses. Fallen petals littered the brick walk. Chloe couldn't understand why she was trembling. Then Cosimo was there, holding her, rocking her, calming her. She clung onto his silly pink overalls and became ten again. The rest didn't matter.

They cleared away the excess furniture, rolled the rug.

and arranged food on the refectory table. Adam poured Chloe another glass of champagne and settled next to her on the windowseat. There were crashes, and at intervals, clouds of dust billowed from the dumpster. A shriek pierced the din.

"Stop! That's a supporting wall... Only the walls with red crosses... everyone... only the walls with red crosses."

Adam laughed and patted her knee. "I like your cousin. You're lucky. I have no family. Is that your grandmother?" He gestured to the painting.

"Yes. How did you know?" She studied the bubbles that popped up from the star at the bottom of the fluted glass.

"You look like her. Family resemblance... old painting... ergo..."

"Ergo nothing. I'm adopted."

"You're kidding?"

"Nope." But since she was ten she had been weaving dreams: fragile fictions that made tolerable her separateness. Kind coincidence had made her dark and fair. The house shook, and a rending of walls could be heard below. In a brief lull, a shrill female voice yelled.

"Arragh! Blood, mutilation... gore... Cosimo... bandages?"

"Good grief. For that scratch? I suppose you'll want a tetnaus shot too?"

"I hope we don't fall through the floor."

"Not as long as Larry's on the case." They laughed and Adam refilled their glasses. Cosimo had laid in a good supply.

"Slainte." The crystal rang, and she sipped, quietly giddy, spilling on the lavender overalls. Her long thick hair was tucked in a painter's cap and she felt comfortably asexual. One of the boys. She giggled.

"What's so funny?"

"At my apartment, I have six saucers, two cups, three plates, and four glasses of diverse lineage."

"Doesn't everybody? I have my Great-Aunt Jenny's soup tureen lid."

"What happened to the tureen?"

"Beats me. I just have the lid. It's most attractive. I use it as a paperweight."

"I have a set of spoons commemorating the coronation of King George the Fifth. Sterling."

"Bet you can't beat a huge copper fish poacher."

"Yes I can. A hand crocheted luncheon set."

"Matching napkins?"

"Of course."

"I concede." He swept off his cap and nearly fell off the windowseat while trying to bow. She stretched her legs over his, surprised at the ease of their intimacy. Had she ever been so relaxed with Kurt? So comfortable, like twins. He topped off her glass.

"You see that piano?"

"That big thing in the middle of the room?"

"Yup."

"Just barely."

"Well as of next week, it's home will be with the chipped cups and the coronation spoons."

"And the luncheon set. I'm impressed. May I?"

She nodded assent. He carefully placed his glass on the floor and moved across the room. He lifted the cover, and began to play; a semi-discordant sombre piece that broke suddenly into violent phrasings and left Chloe vaguely unsettled. It didn't help that Adam abruptly lifted his hands and announced that it wasn't finished yet.

"I just added that latter section. Inspiration of the moment. I think I'll call it 'A Weekend at Cosimo's'. Now you play for me."

"Must I?"

"Yes." He pulled her to her feet and kissed her on the nose. "The moment you walked into my class and high-tailed it to the back row, I was mesmerized. I find it very annoying when you hide behind your book. Now I've taken a terrific amount of trouble to ply you with hootch, and I have every intention to take advantage of your weakened state. Play." He pushed her toward the instrument.

"Yessir. Blow in my ear and I'll play anything. What'll it be? Melancholy Baby? Bach's Chaconne? Variations on a Theme by Schwartz? Without waiting for a reply, she launched into Le Tombeau de Couperin. The rich sound from the rosewood piano filled the room. She forgot the hammering and smashing and thought of Hector; how after five years of working on the piece, she had achieved a certain facility. But she

was still lazy. She stuck to the impressionists, who allowed her to play on the surface of the keys. Her wrists were weak. In one complicated section, she had no end of trouble releasing pressure. Lazy lazy lazy. She should follow Kurt's example and attack the big 19th century composers. That would build up her keyboard stamina. Still, all in all, she didn't do too badly, putting on a good show as she flew over the peaks and valleys of the demanding work. Adam uncrossed his legs and leaned into the music. Chloe rested her hands in her lap as he stared at her for a moment without speaking.

"Well?" She closed the cover.

"You're good. I mean, you're really good."

"No." She shook her head. "I know my limitations. I'm not bad, but I'm not really good."

"Look, I know really good when I hear really good."

"I'm not very versatile. Weak wrists."

"That's nothing. You can work on that. The important thing is the technique. And you've got it. How long have you been playing?"

"Fifteen years."

"Do you want to perform?"

"I don't know. I hadn't really thought about it."

"Like Hell."

"Okay. So I've thought about it. My best friend plays violin with the Chicago, and he's practised eight hours a day since he was three. I don't know if I could do that."

"You haven't been sitting on your hands for fifteen years. What does your friend say? Kurt? He must have told you you're terrific." Adam was holding her hands, bouncing with excitement. God. This was embarrassing. How could she admit that Kurt had never heard her play? She couldn't explain it to herself; so how could she explain it to him? She felt herself blushing.

"He... ah... hasn't said anything... ah, actually I really don't like playing for people, not even him." she lied.

"You're kidding?"

"I don't want people expecting things from me...I think I'll go back to being the ghost of Comp 101, if you don't mind." Chloe tried to pull her hands free; tried to look away.

"You think so, eh?" His eyes were as blue as the deepening twilight outside the window. Warm shadows closed around them. What was she thinking of, fresh from another man's bed?

"Darlings... what naughty things have you been up to? Never mind. I don't want to know." Cosimo flicked on the overhead, and the motley demolition crew, in every shade of pastel, trekked into the room.

"Tea time. Your playing, although delightful, set our work back a half hour. A wall cannot be torn down to the accompaniment of Ravel. A fact which should interest historical preservation societies. They could have a string quartet on retainer. Now, if I might ask a frivolous question, where is everyone going to sit?" He threw his arms in the air as Chloe lined up with the others for food. She wasn't even hungry. Adam had vanished.

#

"I never liked Kurt. He's a perfect fart. Why bother to go to his concert?" The thumping continued downstairs as Cosimo wound Chloe's hair into a tight bun.

"I can't explain it. I can't let go. Maybe I don't want to. I don't know. I'm confused." What did she want now? She could barely admit it to herself. What she wanted was to see Kurt fail. What kind of person was she? She bit her lower lip.

"Well, I'm extremely disappointed. Masochism doesn't run in our family."

She sat in the recess of a three sided mirror. Semi naked Chloes receded to infinity on either side. She adjusted the strap of Grandmother's lace and satin slip.

"You have a lovely swan neck. You should show it off."

"It's a scrawny chicken neck."

"Nonsense. It's very graceful. Earrings. You need earrings." He rushed over to the vanity and dumped the contents of a satin bag in a shimmering heap. "Take your sleepers out." Chloe obediently slid out the gold rings and Cosimo inserted platinum and onyx triangles. They were heavy and tugged at the lobes. She was unaccustomed to ornamentation.

"What did I tell you?" He flew to the next room and she could hear the tearing of zippers, the rustling of heavy plastic. She stared in the mirror. With the deft application of makeup, Cosimo had duplicated Granny's face. It was wierd; uncanny. Could she look so much like her and not have Delaney blood? She'd ask Cosimo. He'd tell her the truth.

"Here we are, Perfect. Is this one of her Ertés? Lift

your arms, dear, and slither this on."

"Cos...?"

"Oh yes..." He lowered the garment of sequined black chiffon over her head, fiddled with the tiny buttons and hooks, and straightened the hang. A faint odour of perfume clung to the fabric which hung gently to her knees. Verbena Cosimo was overturning boxes in the cupboard and emerged with a pair of kid pumps.

"You're too tall for heels. Lift your foot."

"Cosimo..."

"Gosh.. it fits. What luck."

"I've never had such a fuss made over me before."

"Always wanted to do a Pygmalian. I wish the stoidies were worth the trouble, but alas, I've learned from experience they aren't. I don't think this needs a necklace."

"Stoidies?"

"My word. Staid toadies. Three piece suiters. Them."

"Ad opposed to...?"

"Us, of course." He slapped her hand. "Don't touch the hair."

"Then father was a stoidy."

"Absolutely."

"Was your father? I don't know anything about him."

She cast her lure. Get him talking about the family.

"My father..." Cosimo pressed his lips together and scratched his head. "...should have been a stockbroker, but for some perverse reason, decided to be a sculptor."

"Like you?"

"Oh, no no no. He did generals on horseback and bust of the '400'. Stoidy art. Lucrative art. I took it up to win his approval."

"Did you?"

"No. My aberrant sexual tendencies were an unsurpassable impediment. One of his 'artistic' friends seduced me when I was a sweet young thing of twelve, and I quite enjoyed it." He rolled his eyes at the recollection. "They all cried molestation, but I protested. 'No', I said. 'Fun'. So Pater shipped me off to an exclusive boy's prison in Berne. When we were naughty, they threatened to toss us in the bear pit. I arrived as Hitler marched into Poland, but Americans weren't advised to leave Switzerland until Geneva was bombed in May of 1940. We were told to proceed to Bordeaux where ships would be waiting to take us Stateside. The French refused to issue transit visas but by then, everything was in such a state of confusion that no one really bothered to examine our papers. I made it to Paris and sent off cables, but... I didn't hear anything. Then in June... well, Paris fell. Three million people fled the city. I had found a room at a Pension, and it was eerie. The streets were deserted except for German soldiers and military vehicles. Everyone believed they would pillage and loot, but they didn't. They just walked around and took pictures of each other in front of national monuments and cleaned the stores out of stockings and perfume. Then Granny turned up. I'd never met her—just heard these delicious rumours. I guess one of the cables got through, 'cause there she was on my doorstep. She had acquired all the necessary papers and in two days we were in Lisbon. Within the

month, I was back in New York, at art school, and firmly rooted under her roof. God, I'm glad you knew her, even the little you did."

"Me too."

"I know you're wondering why I've been so hasty with the tearing down."

"Sort of."

"It was too much. Everywhere I looked, I expected to see her. In her wing chair, messing around in the kitchen. In the house at night I thought I heard her padding around. The air smelled of her. She was around the corners, in the other room. I couldn't take it." He gripped her shoulder. She pondered that her reaction was the exact reverse. She wanted to cling to the spectre of Granny in her firmament.

"I know."

"Too bad our fathers couldn't have known her as we did."

"Maybe stoidyism skips generations."

"A recessive gene." He wiped some moisture from the corner of his eye as he laughed. "Every other generation gets what it wants."

"And stoidies don't?"

"Stoidies get what they think they should have."

A fine distinction. Chloe wondered what Kurt thought he should have. Did he really want to travel around in a yan? Cosimo turned her head from side to side, examining his handiwork. Her lure snagged on the rocks somewhere. She couldn't figure a way to wiggle it back to the topic of her parentage.

"You'll get what you want, as soon as you know what it is you want."

"What?"

"Eliot defined singlemindedness as 'the condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything.' That's about you. You won't need a coat. It's positively balmy." He wrapped a gossamer shawl, shot with thread of silver around her shoulders. "One caution, dear heart; don't ever compress yourself into a neat little package that fits nicely into someone else's scheme. It won't work. " Small amber flecks burned in the blue grey of his iris. "And another thing..."

"What?"

"The boy is trying his hardest to pitch a little woo."

"Huh?" What was he talking about? What boy? Kurt?

"Don't worry. I'm on to Kurt."

"Not Kurt."

"You don't have to shout."

"Never mind. Look, why don't you just stay here."

"I have to go."

He sighed. "All right, go. Stubborn woman."

Just as she thought. Disaster.

She waited as the audience filed out. Kurt's friend, Bernie, crumpled his programme in a ball and tossed it on the empty stage. It rolled under the piano which stood alone in the harsh glare of the house lights; the stool pushed

back as though Kurt had just bowed into the wings. His terror had been palpable, the performance, stiff and self-conscious. Chloe drew the shawl over her shoulders. She had wished to see him fail, but she hadn't realised how horrible the reality would be. He would never make it as a concert artist. Something was lacking, a void that was just exposed before three hundred people: his peers, his teachers, and the critics who had made obvious their displeasure by walking out at intermission, and not returning. She looked at Bernie. He shrugged. The hall was empty now.

In the lobby, some stragglers lingered, chatting, waiting for cabs. She found a cigarette in her purse, but no match. Bernie shook his head apologetically.

"Don't smoke."

A couple in jeans standing in front of a billboard display were smoking. There was a stock poster with a picture of hands over a keyboard, and the name KURT WELLS: the date. She was about to bum a light when the boy made piano playing movements with his hands and burst out laughing.

They had been waiting twenty minutes when they heard the music. It was the Brahms Intermezzo Kurt had played all summer. Bernie peered through the auditorium doors and motioned for Chloe to approach. A work light shed a small incandescent glow over the piano. Kurt's pale head was bent over the keys. The house was dark. They groped their way down the aisle and sat mid-way. He was oblivious to their presence. It was nothing like his earlier performance. There was a certain

perversity in the ease with which he commanded the interpretation. This is how he should have been playing before. She felt the unfamiliar frisson prick her skin. He had never played so well.

"Behold, three double scotches." Bernie whispered.

"He should play only when drunk."

"Drunk?" His fingers flew.

"Sure. Look. He's totally in his stride. It's incredible. I mean, listen to that phrasing... brilliant."

It was nothing short of miraculous. If this was the case, why did he wait until after the concert to drink? Bernie poked her arm.

"Usually the best that can be said of him, is that he hits the right notes. He hates the piano. He fucks the piano. Only when he's ripped, does he forget."

"Then why does he want...?"

"Want, want... he doesn't want. I've known him for fifteen years. His parents want. Anyway, you don't choose a vocation. It chooses you. Too bad he's so damned proficient."

Kurt was relaxed; even smiling. Chloe thought that seeing him fail would reveal something, but the only thing it told her was that he didn't care. The work light haloed his white hair. She sighed. He was pathetic.

She wished he hadn't come. Chloe hiked up her dress and climbed under the railing. The huge metal bin was spilling over with Cosimo's walls and floors and ceilings. Kurt, still

in tails, pulled himself up after her and they entered the hall together, or what was left of it. Party sounds filtered down from upstairs as she surveyed the wreckage. There had been a perfunctory sweep of debris, and the air was redolent of damp and must. Where the dining room floor had been, there was a gaping cavity to the kitchen below. It appeared as it might in an artists' mind: coated in a fine white dust as though sculpted in plaster. All the interior walls were gone. Even the ones with red crosses. Joists, braces, beams, replaced these. Only the staircase remained, the Bellini column sadly scratched. Her carved fireplace mantle was propped against an exterior wall, swathed in sheets. There was a shuffling sound. Kurt, scuffing through the plaster, grimaced.

"Let's go up." Her voice sounded hollow. She really wished he hadn't come.

"Chloe, dearest..." Cosimo whipped off her shawl and tossed it over a picture frame. "You look as though you've been through the wars. What has this dreadful person been doing to you?" He frowned at Kurt, who despite the oblique greeting, grabbed his hand and shook it vigorously.

"Mr. Delaney...I'm pleased and honoured to meet you..."

"Mr. Delaney?" He looked at Chloe. "I haven't been called that since Groton."

Chloe wanted to die. Did Kurt have to grovel? Adam waved in her direction as Kurt yanked Cosimo into a corner.

Chairs had been dragged back in, and the wrecking crew were lounging about the room. Smitty pushed her way between the bodies, clearing glasses and emptying ashtrays. What did she think of all this? No more furniture to polish; only statues and rubber floors. As she passed through the door she wiped a handprint off the doorframe, muttering Irish curses; no doubt. Someone was playing ragtime on the piano. Adam approached her.

"How was the concert?"

"Don't ask."

"If it was that bad, why is he looking so perky?"

"God knows."

They looked at each other. She had the feeling he could see right through her. Cosimo threw a pleading glance from the corner where Kurt had him trapped. She dragged Adam over. Some couples were waltzing. Odd how early Joplin resembled late Chopin.

"...and we're going to call it COMMUNICATION."

Oh no. It didn't occur to her that he'd try and touch Cosimo for money. The little brown nosing creep.

"Three musicians: piano, cello, and violin. And a van. We'd travel to colleges, schools, community centres, basically performing works on demand from a limited repertoire... so like... if a theatre class wanted baroque... we'd do baroque... and if a dance class wanted Debussy..."

"... you'd do Debussy... and if a primal scream therapy group wanted John Cage... you'd do John Cage... I get the point."

Cosimo was desperate. Kurt pressed on.

"Well, what do you think?"

The room became awkwardly silent. Adam's watch read twenty past.

"We thought we'd begin with two units. The initial outlay would be the cost of the vans, basic expenses and salaries. We have the philosophical support of most of the faculty at Juilliard..."

"... and you want my philosophical support too?"

Cosimo briskly kissed him on the mouth. "Well, my boy, you have it. Most wholeheartedly. It's the perfect little stoidy project... Adam, play something, anything... now." He glared at Chloe and practically threw Adam over to the piano where he began to play a boistrous rendition of a Beatle's song. The sub-current shifted, and people, relieved, started singing.

When I am old and losing my hair

Many years from now

Will you still be sending me a Valentine

Birthday greetings, bottle of wine...

Chloe reached into the tub where a few bottles of champagne still bobbed in the ice water. Kurt was staring off, rather stupidly she thought, after her cousin. She turned her back to him; located a glass, used, but unbroken, and went over to the windowseat to sit next to a woman in a green surgical gown. Flecks of plaster dotted her head. When she saw Chloe, she yelped.

"Glory! You must be psychic. I was too fagged to stand much less walk across the room. I've never worked so hard in

my life. My back aches. My tits feel like flabby bruises." She took the bottle, untwisted the wire, and pressed the cork with her thumbs. It shot across the room with a sharp report and bounced off the far wall.

Will you still need me, will you still feed me
When I'm sixty-four?

Maybe once. She didn't think so anymore. Kurt, fox-trotted around by an older man in a red jumpsuit, smiled in passing. Chloe filled the two glasses, drank hers, and filled it again.

"How do you fit in? You must be related. Delaney's written all over you." The woman held out her empty glass. Why fight it?

"I'm Cosimo's cousin."

"Oh, I love that man. I'd die for that man. He is such a beautiful person. One of the beautifullest. I owe him about a million dollars..." The word 'million' languished over five seconds. "... and has he ever mentioned it or dropped little hints?" She gazed deep into Chloe's eyes. Chloe gulped her champagne. "Not once. Never. He's a saint. Can you answer me a question?"

Chloe shrugged. "I can try." She filled the glasses again. There wasn't much mileage in a bottle of bubbly.

"Why is it that all the really good men are gay?" The woman's eyes were welling up. Not living in New York, Chloe didn't have a good answer. They needed more drink. She patted the woman on the knee. Most definitely, but the bucket seemed extraordinarily far away. She weaved between the dancers. Kurt was now resting his white-blonde head on the ample bosom of

a lady in a grey business suit sporting a crew cut. Cosimo, perched on the edge of the piano, was doing a Helen Morgan to Adam's accompaniment. He wailed.

I need to laugh, and when the sun is out

I've got something I can laugh about

I feel good, in a special way

I'm in love and I'm a happy gay... good day sunshine...

His friends cheered as he exposed his hairy calves, and further demonstrated their appreciation by throwing money into the painter's cap at his feet.

Chloe found a quiet corner where she could polish off a bottle in peace. The bathroom. She sat in the enormous sarcophagus of pink-marble adorned with nymphs in bas relief. The floor was pink marble. She had rather fancied the idea of sprawling on the floor, but couldn't figure out a way to drink in the horizontal, so she opted for the bath. Pink ionic columns crept up the walls, and bushy palms from terra cotta pots. She squinted her eyes until the pastoral scenes on the porcelain tiles became a blur. The abandonment of her obsession with Kurt was akin to the slipping away of an ache, so persistent, that she hadn't been truly sensible to the discomfort. She acknowledged with polite nods the passage of people through the bathroom. They nodded back and went about their business.

Someone had the bright idea to do the bunny-hop. Seven

or eight people were bouncing around the piano. The floor vibrated ominously, but since Larry was third in line, she tried not to concern herself. The windowseat was vacant. She noticed the flapping tabs of the green surgical gown bringing up the rear of the dancers. It was hot. She pushed open the window and dangled her legs out. A patrol car slowed as it passed the house, then drove on. The sky glowed. There were no stars.

Chloe mused that there had to be something genetic in it, carried away with her own fantasy. A circle formed as she performed a bump and grind routine. The floor was slippery with plaster dust, and she lifted the shimmering dress to entice with a generous revelation of thigh and lacy drawers. How droll. A thin strap fell from her shoulder, and to the encouragement of whistles and cat calls, she unpinned her chignon and shook her long hair. Screw Kurt.

Dancing close. Nice. Safe. The acrid smell of body odour. No bosom. Good. A long fingered hand pushed her hair off her face and she was being kissed. Adam. Was it possible to be closer? She wanted to be closer. So sleepy. The metal clasps of his overalls dug into her chest.

Second wind. Chloe sat in a fat chair, her legs flung over the arm. Pizza had been delivered, and she was chewing on a wedge of all-dressed. The man in the red jump suit rested

his head on her hip, and supplied her with cigarettes. He was a gynecologist. Somehow, she found that hilarious, and told him so. He did too, and offered her a free appointment. Kurt intruded over the back of the chair and whispered in her ear.

"Let's go back to my place." His rented suit was smeared with white dust. He stared down the front of her dress. She replied in a loud voice.

"Why? Aren't you having a good time? I'm having a good time." She turned to the gynecologist. "Aren't I having a good time?" He nodded and passed her a joint that was doing the rounds.

"You don't want me to leave with that pale short person do you?"

He shook his head and kissed her hand. "I should be simply devastated. Take a drag, honey."

She coughed out the smoke and passed the joint to Smitty who wrinkled her nose and threw it in the lazy butler.

"There you have it, Kurt. It's impossible. It appears I'm having a good time here."

He buried his face in her hair and she struggled over the chair arm trying to stand. He nearly fell over.

"Go home, Kurt. Go to Sheboygan. Just go."

"I don't understand."

There was a sudden lull, and everyone stared. Cosimo, with his usual intuition, unfolded from his lotus position on the piano stool and cleared the way. He knew what she should

do before she did herself. Perhaps he was willing her to do this. He led her to the instrument. The room was still, with only a hint of a city humming in the night air. She sat and glanced at Kurt with his slightly bewildered expression. He had asked for it; for this. He could have shown an interest. He could have listened to her. He could have given a shit. She mattered. Her music mattered. She began to play, Debussy's 'Plus Que Lente.' It flowed from her fingertips. It was a piece she could play in her sleep; easier than singing in the bath. The languid sentimentality drifted over her audience, evoking other places and times, and she hoped with all her heart, that for Kurt, it would forever after evoke, this place, this night, that exactly how he failed would haunt him with the melody.

Chloe fixed her eyes on the painting of Grandmother, a half smile, an enigma directed at her. Grandmother would understand? She forgot where she was; forgot Kurt with his disbelief; forgot, Adam's support, Cosimo's complicity. Her hands worked automatically, and she played not with her head, but another part of her. Something came clear: a communion between music and player. All distinction ceased. As the last poignant chords faded, she felt the touch of the cold brass pedals against her bare feet. Her hands dropped. Her spine tingled. Adam was standing beside her. People were clapping. He helped her to her feet and over to the windowseat. There was a creeping greyness in the sky. She glimpsed a shadowy figure with white hair turn a corner at the end of the street. Adam closed the window and held her as she began to shake.

The dress hung from a mirror. It wore well for its fifty years. There were no tears. Chloe zipped her fly and braided her hair in a single plait that fell to the middle of her back. A bath had revived her. She took some socks and sneakers from her bag and sat on the corner of the bed. Cosimo walked in as she was tying her bows.

"I thought you'd be asleep."

"Then why'd you come in?"

"So I lied. I heard you bashing around."

"I do not bash around."

His old corduroy bathrobe was wrinkled and he hadn't shaved.

"You're leaving."

She folded her skirt and closed the bag. "What would we do without zippers?"

"Velcro?"

"Naw. Too violent. All that tearing racket."

"Does Adam know you're going?" He must have had a bath too. His hair was damp. She slipped on a blazer and flipped the braid to hang in front. If the mirror could be relied upon, she looked about fifteen.

"He's asleep."

"And you won't be there when he wakes up." He was annoyed with her.

"This is hardly the last act of Camille. I'll see him on Tuesday. I have a lot of thinking to do before then."

He nodded.

"What you said, about knowing what you want... well,

isn't it equally important to know what you don't want?"

"Always doing things the hard way. Profound sigh."

"What's the time?"

A horn blared outside, and she ran to the window and waved.

"My cab. There's a nine o'clock flight."

Cosimo touched the dress. The beadwork made a glistening sound as it touched the mirror. "Take it. It doesn't become me at all. Black, you know..."

"I'll be back. I'll wear it to dance on your white Pirelli floors."

"...with Adam."

She noted that he made it a statement. Did he think he was running her life? The driver honked again, four times in rapid succession.

"Bugger Adam."

"I'd love to, but he prefers you." Cosimo flipped her pig-tail while dust motes, sparkling in a shaft of sun elongated their shadows and sending reflections from the beaded dress dancing along the wall.

#

The maple bark was smooth, almost cool under her cheek. Tiny red specks that turned out to be spiders, crawled onto her hand. She couldn't feel them. Not the faintest tickle. Three runners in McGill sweatshirts padded by, then a herd of day-camp children clutching lunchboxes. Chloe clung weakly to the tree trunk and stared down the narrow track that led to the foot of the precipice. The saplings along the path were too few and too slender to aid a descent, and she decided against it, instead pressing closer to the tree, smelling its sweet tree-smell, allowing the spiders to invade her hair, her skin, her clothes. A man bicycled past, holding a Great Dane on a leash. The dog galloped alongside, his pink tongue lolling from the side of his mouth, drooling; the huge paws crunching on the gravel.

There were private places on the mountain, if you were fortunate enough to find one. Chloe struggled to leave the tree. She could find a spot and sleep; lie down under a rustling poplar and sleep. If she was asleep, she wouldn't have to think anymore, or try to remember. It was a breathless day; a breathless summer since that day in June. Her head ached. Her head had ached that day too, the day they found her on the Metro, with her parcels around her, just staring.

A boy with a violin case slung over his back on a piece of rope, navigated the cliff path, and surfaced on Chloe's left. He stopped and subjected her to a long, curious gaze before proceeding up the mountain on the other side of the

road. What was he looking at? She was empty. There was nothing to see; nothing but a receptor of sensations: smells, tastes, textures, the sum of which was hollowness. Chloe blew the little red spiders off her hand and crossed the road.

The path was overgrown, and branches slapped her legs and face. Through the trees, she could detect the glinting of water, so she followed. A rocky hollow with the remains of the spring runoff, she thought. The woods ended suddenly and she was in a tiny glade. Enormous glacial boulders entrapped the sun in a curve of sparkling granite. In the centre of the small clearing stood a horse's watering trough, similar to the one on the road that ringed the mountain. It too was carved from granite, only there were no tiles lining the interior. The odd stone figure of a faun crouched at one end of the rectangular basin, water dripping from his mouth. Chloe passed from the shade of the woods into the sunlight with something approaching awe. In all her years of Sunday treks with Adam, she had not known of this place. Columbine and Queen Ann's Lace sprang from the humus at the foot of the towering rocks. She touched one of the deep purple blossoms, noticing at the same time that there were no candy wrappers or beer cans defiling the sanctity of the place. A wild duck, a luminescent band of blue-green encircling its neck, swooped into the trough, and drank, bathed, flew away, leaving the water dancing.

Chloe steadied herself on the stone haunch of the faun and thrust her hand into the cool water. Spring fed? There was

no algae. A few dead leaves lay still on the clean bottom. But who cleaned it? Her pale reflection shivered into nothingness as she swept the water with her fingers. Two blackbirds broke out of the woods and beat the air with their anxious flight as Chloe climbed into the basin. It was big, longer than she was, and allowed her to float suspended on the surface of the water. She closed her eyes against the insistent grin of the stone creature, and felt the cold penetrate her flesh. No one would come to disturb her in this dream place. Her submerged ears could hear only the gentle plonk of water dripping, constantly dripping from the mouth of the faun. What a lovely thing it would be, she thought, to vanish into this secret place, hidden on the mountain, to simply give up. To have all the senses, all the emotion, all the pain leave her. Grandmother was smiling as she floated in the water lilies. Was she smiling at the photographer or merely to have been floating? Would anyone miss her as Grandmother had been missed? Would anyone cry over her scented scarves or curse her soul for leaving a hole in their lives? Granny, Cosimo, Olga, Hector... all dead, and Adam in California with a new life she had no part in. Her skin was tingling, numb, and the lassitude, the creeping inertia settled on her; the sense of peace. She had only ever once felt this way: when a very small child, lying in the snow, the soft flakes falling thick and heavy, burying her. If one could only fade into this, know forever this oneness with the elements around you. Who would care?

She suddenly pulled herself up, clutching the rounded edge of the trough. The sun had passed behind the ring of boulders, casting the glade in shadow. What was she doing? The faun leered down at her, the drip persisting from a rusty groove at the side of his lip. He laughed soundlessly. The noise of twigs snapping and children laughing rose over the wall of rocks, and Chloe knew that she had to return, that she wanted to return.

Andrew might care.

5

Chloe unzipped the clothing bag, removed the Chinese coat, and lay it across the foot of the bed. It was pure silk, inside and out. The colour was graduated: pale cream at the shoulders, descending to a darker shade at the hem — the luminescent green of the underside of a wave in the sunshine. Two deep slits worked their way up the flared body of the coat, and the sleeves widened to a broad sweep at the wrist. The embroidery was in a faded yellow thread; a small wave pattern at the border; a blanket of wild chrysanthemums overall. It fastened down the front with spherical brass buttons in the shape of buds.

Laurence would be home soon. The sitter would arrive at seven-thirty, perhaps seven-twenty-five, she was very conscientious. Andrew was busy in his room playing with Lego. If one could succeed in building Lego into an amorphous mass, Andrew had succeeded. All the other toys were placed neatly on the shelves that lined one wall. The exception was Bert, who occupied a place of honour on the upper bunk. Andrew didn't play with dolls anymore, only the Lego. She hadn't had much experience with children before Andrew. He lost himself in the architectural wonder of the little bricks. She stared at him and pondered her continuing suspicion that

he was unlike other five-year-olds. Maybe she should stop taking the pill. Would Laurence talk her into another abortion?

They had been married in the period when strict adherence to social convention was not only regarded as passé, but actively scorned. They bowed to the pressure of the times with a private ceremony at the McGill Chapel, witnessed by Cosimo, Basil, and no one else. She wore a gown of dusky Oxford blue, and wanted only to exchange vows. His mother's engagement ring was taken from the safety deposit box for a token wearing, and returned when the bank opened the next morning. Laurence found her a soupy antique emerald ring and convinced her that if she wore it on the middle finger, all factions would be satisfied. She found herself agreeing, and she rushed around with Cosimo until she found him one too. Cosimo picked it out. It was a mourning ring with black enamel on gold, inscribed:

Marie Billings

OBT 1815

Act 87

Laurence was tickled pink and insured it for five hundred dollars. She paid ninety. He wore it on his baby finger until the enamel chipped off a few years later while he was playing squash. It sat, unrepaired in his cuff-link box with the dress studs and odd buttons she never got around to sewing back on his shirts. She rarely bothered wearing her ring. It distracted her when she played the piano

She could scarcely remember when she hadn't played. Her father had been on the board of a small private school, now defunct, and the kindergarten section had been full, so they stuck her in grade one where there was a space. She was the youngest, the smallest, and the dumbest. It had been a year of pain and isolation. Every afternoon, she had come home, shut the door to her room, and cried for an hour or two, playing records so her parents wouldn't hear. They heard only the music, so they assumed she had an interest and started her on the piano. Within months, to their delight, she was playing the early pieces of Mozart. One day at school, she began playing before the bell, and to her astonishment the entire class clustered around.

She began to see, that through accomplishment, she might gain acceptance, but by the year's end, she still hadn't learned to read. The only letters she could recognise were C, D, E, F, G, A, and B, so she was held back. Looking through her files, she had come across her report cards. That year, she had been absent forty-four days. Andrew had been reading at three and hadn't been sick a day in his life. Why did he hide in his room?

The Chinese coat had been an engagement present. It was antique too. She wasn't sure if it was a man's or a woman's; the Chinese were all so small. Probably smaller a century ago. Did Chinese men wear robes with flowers embroidered all over? Probably a large woman, by Chinese

standards. A tall woman with little, bound, deformed feet encased in tiny, red silk shoes. She would have sat around the house all day, in an ornamental sort of way because it would have been too painful to walk. Her fingernails would have been long, her hands, smooth and white.

Chloe bit her nails because she couldn't stand the clicking sound on the keys as she played, and her fingers were long, although not particularly elegant. She had read that the most important feature of the bound foot was its effect on the sex life. It was said a woman could be brought to orgasm merely by having them caressed; that men were driven wild by the odour they exuded, and liked to suck them; preferably without bindings but more usually with. She found this fascinating. Pain, inextricably tied to pleasure. Submissive little bound feet touched the hem of this very robe.

"Mommy, Mommy, look what I made." The grey eyes that implored her were Laurence's. If she hadn't been in on the delivery, she might have doubted she'd had anything to do with this child. He wasn't at all like her. She was dark and brown eyed, and he was fair, like Laurence. It was unjust, really. He came from a family of what seemed like a hundred people, and she was adopted. The very least God could've done was given her a kid who looked like her.

"I'm going to need some more Lego, Mommy. I'm running out."

"But sweetheart, you can take them apart and start over."

There was already more than a hundred dollars invested in this digital amoebic mess. She couldn't see the point to it all. It didn't look like anything.

"No I can't. This is a new world. I need more."

He didn't whine, or make it sound like a demand. It was a matter-of-fact statement. She sighed. Like Laurence, he could make any request, no matter how outrageous, sound reasonable. If five years ago, she had gone ahead with the pregnancy in defiance of Laurence's wishes, Andrew would have a sibling upstairs right now, plucking apart the blessed Lego, and scattering it to oblivion. She couldn't argue with people like that, so convinced of the rightness of their opinions. Opposition was pointless. She said nothing.

Laurence liked sex. He liked enthusiastic, gymnastic sex with a slim, agile partner. Her pregnancy had cramped his style. Two pregnancies in two years was one more than he would tolerate. It took her a few years to divine the real reason he had talked her into ending it.

"Where are you and Daddy going tonight?"

"The museum."

"Can I go too?"

"No. It's past your bedtime."

"It's Friday night..."

"Oh good. Then I'll take you to see the exhibition tomorrow, after the library." He frowned at the floor for

a moment. She had the fleeting desire to hug him, and felt guilty when it passed.

"And we'll go to lunch at MacDonald's, okay?"

He stared at her with no expression in particular and wandered back to the new world in his bedroom.

The museum show was quite a coup for the director. On display was the largest collection of archaeological artifacts ever to leave the People's Republic, and it included a good representation of recent finds from the city of Xing. She had wanted to wear Grandmother's beaded black dress. It made her feel inconspicuous, but if anyone did notice her, it was a flattering cut. Laurence had convinced her that the Chinese coat would be more appropriate. She didn't doubt it. Half the people at the opening would be wearing a Chinese something or other. It would be a bloody uniform.

She lay down on the thick red living room carpet and dug her fingers into the pile. She had put nail polish on for the first time in months. It was the same shade as the rug. She had bought it because it was a comfortably familiar colour. It drew attention to the stubbiness of her nails. The cleaning lady had been and vacuum tracks criss-crossed the carpet. Chloe loved the place when it was all clean, shiny and dusted. She didn't want to go to the museum. She wanted to stay home and curl up in the fat armchair beside

the fire with a sleazy book and some Bristol Cream. Just like an ad. She would encourage Laurence to go alone and cancel the sitter. He would have a late dinner with friends and she would have five hours of peace. She would be asleep by the time he returned home, and he wouldn't dare wake her. The rug felt pleasantly rough against her cheek.

"Why are you lying on the rug, Mommy?"

Why are you lying on the rug, Mommy? Why, for God's sake, didn't he simply pounce on her like any other kid? She lifted her head, and there he was in his bright red Osh Kosh overalls, staring at her like a suspicious policeman.

"Because it seemed like the best place to be at this particular moment."

"Oh. I see." Did he? Did he see? Or was he just trying to make things less awkward for himself?

"Do you want to come and see my new world?"

"I saw it an hour ago, darling."

"But I've just finished the cave of unrepentant spirits."

Where on earth did he pick up that concept? She and Laurence were atheists, and his school was non-denominational. Wasn't it Descartes who, all by himself at the age of five, huddled in bed at night, had discovered by his own efforts most of the geometrical propositions? Was Andrew a theological prodigy? What a repulsive idea.

"Okay, honey. I'll come in a minute."

He turned and walked up the stairs. He never ran, up or down. Did other mothers dream of having a child like hers?

She yanked a loose thread from her dressing gown and sat at the piano. Laurence was in the shower. She had not yet told him she wanted to stay home. Her fingers automatically fell on the opening chords of a Chopin nocturne. Good. A short time ago it would have been automatically Mozart, or automatically Ravel. Her teacher's insistence that she concentrate on nineteenth century works was paying off. Her wrists were stronger and the required pressure came effortlessly. She played absentmindedly. Her eyes wandered about the room. She had annexed half the third floor for a studio, knocked out a wall, installed skylights, and moved Grandmother's old rosewood Chickering grand up from the living room. She loved the austerity of the space: it opposed the clutter of Laurence's ancestral things on the lower floors. The carpet was pale beige, the walls a shade darker. She shunned window shades and the glass disappeared in the indigo twilight. The only furnishings in the room were the piano and bench, and several delicate brass shelf units, stacked with sheet music. If anyone wanted to listen to her play, they had to sit on the floor. On one wall facing the piano, was an oil painting: a seascape, undistinguished and unsigned. She had found it in a junk shop in France on their honeymoon, and had been attracted by the way the anonymous artist had captured the elusive quality of light before a storm. It had cost her twenty francs. Laurence balked when she spent two hundred on custom framing. She paid for it herself. The lighting in the room was supplied by the windows,

the skylights, and an oil lamp. The piano loved under one skylight, and a weeping Java fig under the other. Curled yellow leaves littered the rug around the fig's base.

She thought she was doing Laurence a favour by bringing music into his home. He didn't even have a stereo when she met him. Although he attended all her recitals at McGill, he never discussed music with her. She assigned it to natural reticence, and after they were married, she played for him in the evenings while he read. She was determined to impress him, and although she had always had an indifferent sort of discipline, took to practising long hours during the day. The woman in the adjoining townhouse, a retired concert pianist, heard her, and offered to give her lessons. Laurence seemed pleased, and encouraged her to accept. That had been after the abortion.

Andrew was weaned on Scriabin and Beethoven. Still, Laurence declined to talk music with her. She realised with a shock one day, that she had never heard him sing. Not even hum, or whistle. When she asked him about it, he confessed that he couldn't. She didn't believe him. Anyone who could talk, could sing. She asked him to try the opening bars of 'O Canada', and ~~enough~~ enough, he couldn't stay on key. He was tone deaf. Hard on this revelation, she moved her piano to the attic.

Her hands moved unconsciously over the keys, through the

nocturne and into Ravel's 'Pavanne for a Dead Princess'. She was half-way through when she heard the stairs creak, and the whine of the door being pushed open. She hated it when Laurence violated her space. Like an atheist in church, he didn't belong here. She tried to mask her indignation, but was afraid her fingers would betray her. She hoped her voice would sound natural.

"What brings you to the inner sanctum?"

"You."

"So what should I wear tonight?"

"I thought we decided on the Chinese coat."

"With pants or a dress? Or naked underneath?"

He had come dripping up the stairs in his bathrobe, his wet feet leaving dark impressions on her pale carpet. She could feel him staring as she played. A chill ran down her spine. She hated being stared at. And he was smiling. That meant he wanted something.

"That would be nice."

"Which?"

"Naked. We could sneak into a dark corner with the ecclesiastical art and I could plank you against the wall."

"Or a convenient statue. I thought the black satin pants. Which shoes?"

"How 'bout the black spiky heels we got last year?"

"Well, for one thing, the last time we wore them we had to carry us home from Place des Arts."

"I remember."

"We were crippled for a week."

"You're very alluring when you limp."

"You're sick."

"And you love every minute of it, don't you?"

"Do I?"

"You'll wear the black heels and cling to my arm like a helpless lily. You can hobble through the halls of culture, wobble down the stairs, and if I'm lucky, you'll go flying and twist your ankle. That could mean two weeks in bed."

"Wouldn't that just be too convenient?"

"Hmm."

"If you like the damned things so much, you wear them."

"Killjoy."

"Sadist." She realized that while they were talking she had progressed halfway through the 'Winter Winds' etude.

"Laurence, would you mind awfully if I stayed home tonight? I don't know that I'm up to the culture mongering hoardes."

"And deny me the opportunity to show you off? Not a chance." He slid his hand through the open front of her dressing gown and kneaded her breast. His body pressed into her back.

"Not now, sweetie,"

"Yes. Now."

"Andrew is still up."

"He's busy with the new Lego I brought home."

"You spoil him. He has a ton of Lego already."

"It keeps him occupied... and don't change the subject."
He slipped his hands under her knees and lifted her off the piano bench.

"You'll smear my make-up."

"I won't go near your face." He immediately contradicted himself by kissing her dead on the mouth. There was no point in arguing.

She was still flushed from lovemaking, and didn't know whether to put on more rouge or not. She had re-styled her long hair into a smooth cap ending in a coiled bun at the nape of her neck. Cosimo had spent an entire afternoon once, showing her how to style her hair and apply cosmetics. He had taught her more about personal grooming than her mother. She stood before the vanity mirror and dabbed perfume on her temples and behind her ears where the golden studs were just visible. She wore no other jewelery. The coat was ornament enough. She stared at her reflection for a long time without blinking, and after a while it wasn't Chloe, but another woman staring back, with sad dark eyes.

She had checked her cape and boots, and was pulling the cream shoes over thin nylon socks. They were Laurence's socks, and the heels reached her ankles. Fortunately the pants fell over them, and no one would notice. A woman in the check line surveyed her robe and nodded, almost imperceptibly. Chloe felt gratified. It was easy to win

appreciative glances from men — a little cleavage, a little thigh, but women — that was praise worth having. Laurence came toward her, smiling, and they climbed the stairs together. A cluster of people stood around the bar, drinks in hand, and she waited on the fringe while Laurence ~~battled~~ through. She was acutely conscious of being stared at, and tried to appear nonchalant. 'Lie back and enjoy it, dear,' Cosimo would say. A man in a dinner jacket started toward her, but she made a great show of examining a carving in a glass case. He turned away. The piece was a lotus jar in white jade (what was it called? Camphor jade?), not unlike the merchandise in Gump's catalogue, and she had a vague idea what her birthday present might be that year. Laurence approached her with two glasses of red wine. He was grinning.

"Do you believe that tux over there?" She recognised a local celebrity wearing a remarkably gaudy brocade suit with an overall design of dragons.

"He certainly looks silly."

"I expect someone paid him to model it."

"I should hope so. He should get some compensation for his humiliation." He was also wearing gold ballet slippers. When he kissed some man in green leather full on the mouth, she turned and headed for the exhibition rooms. The second man reminded her of Basil: the so-called artist who had wormed his way into Cosimo's home, pocket-book, and bed.

Chloe spotted a familiar smile across the room, and a

hand waving to her above the crowd. Laurence had posed her next to a display case containing Tang horses. The yellow and green glaze complimented the colours in her robe.

"Did you see Mrs. Leander's face? She collects antique Chinese robes, and she was lusting for ours."

She didn't hear. The thin, curly haired man angled toward her, his lady in tow. The old fluttering heart. How long had it been? Why did he have to be with someone? Why did she? A flashbulb popped in her face as he finally broke through.

"Who's that?"

"Adam Carothers. He taught me composition in college. We used to go together."

"You never told me that."

"It never came up." She whispered. Adam stepped forward to embrace her and kissed her lightly on the cheek.

"You are as lovely as ever. Nice coat."

He looked surprised. Did he expect that she had descended into frumpiness in the intervening years?

"Thanks. You're looking pretty good yourself. I see you shed the pony tail."

"Yup. The sixties are done." He remembered the lady on his arm. "Chloe... this is Monique Boisvert. Monique, mon amie, Chloe et..." He seemed to notice Laurence for the first time, size him up, and dismiss him all in the same glance.

"This is my husband... Laurence."

"Laurence. Enchantée..." She pronounced it Laurent. They

shook hands and eyed each other, to Adam's amusement. Chloe, seeing Laurence from another perspective, supposed he was reasonably handsome, and Laurence seemed preoccupied with Monique's breasts. An astounding pair.

"I understand that you have been under Olga Pederovski's capable tutelage?"

"How do you know?"

"Cosimo."

"You still see him?"

"Oh, yes. We're thick as thieves."

"Oh." Cosimo had never mentioned that he and Adam were friends. His name hadn't come up since her marriage. At times it was as though they were performing an intricate minuet around the subject. When she had made her choice, her cousin had made it clear he thought it was the wrong one, once and once only. He disliked Laurence, she disliked Basil. That was that.

"Qui est Olga Peder... quoi?"

"Pederovski. A wonderful lady." Said Adam.

"A slavedriver. She won't let me touch the keys with my beloved impressionists."

"Good for her."

"The house shakes when I practise now. Hideous Beethoven."

"I once had a long drunken chat with her over a bottle of vodka, and she confessed to me that to support herself in Paris after she escaped Russia, she performed 'exotic' dances in nightclubs, and billed herself as 'Olga the Tartar'."

"It doesn't surprise me a bit. She has this little whip..."

"... and whenever you hit a wrong note or start slacking into Debussy..."

"Whap."

He reached out and touched her cheek. Monique and Laurence were talking at a slight distance.

"Adam..."

"I'd like to hear you play."

"I'm getting... not bad."

"Getting not bad is not bad."

"Not bad at all. Olga wants her agent to hear me."

"Can I hear you?"

"I'm in the book."

Laurence looked up, alarm vaguely registering on his face.

"An agent? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I was going to, if anything came of it."

"What might come of it?"

"Well, he might offer me a contract and get me concert bookings."

"Are you good enough?"

"For goodness sake, you hear me all the time."

Chloe waved her arm, knocking Laurence's glass of wine. The red liquid splashed down the front of her robe, turning the chrysanthemums an unpleasant shade of orange.

"Jesus... Chloe..."

"Oh, it'll clean."

"You can't get red wine out. It's ruined."

She suspected he was less upset about the robe than about her performing in public, but then, you never could tell with Laurence. She felt a sudden pity for him. He looked like a puppy who'd been kicked. He couldn't know how good she was. He didn't know Liberace from Richter. Adam shifted his weight to the other foot and took Monique's arm. Laurence disappeared in the crowd.

"We've got to go. " He sounded apologetic. "We have a dinner engagement at Claude Bissonet's. Remember him?"

"Sure. Atonality, right?"

"Middle of the road now. France Joli has recorded a few of his numbers."

"I suppose he has to eat."

"Oh, no. He enjoys every minute of it. Poor Claude. But he gives terrific parties. I'll call this week sometime. Some afternoon, right?"

There was the old subtle but unmistakable pull. He was going where talking music was natural and easy. Tomorrow, when he was still asleep next to Monique, she would be drinking tea in the breakfast room, seeing her picture on the Gazette social page. He squeezed her arm, and she detected an invitation in his eyes.

"Fine... yes.... good." Monique seemed the possessive type. They wouldn't last long together. Adam was looking very good to her right now, and she wondered if she were capable of deceiving Laurence. It would be so easy. The thing was,

she didn't know if she wanted that sort of complication. She wanted solitude more.

She watched Adam penetrate the crowd until his curls were lost to her sight. Laurence was looking for salt to put on the stain. She knew that as certainly as she knew Laurence. He always thought he could fix things... like the trip to Greece after the abortion; naked sunbathers and women smashing the flaccid bodies of octopuses against the rocks. So Claude was writing the popular chanson for the popular chanteuse... and here was Laurence with a bottle of soda and a salt shaker...

It was unusually warm for this time of year and she could see stars above the streetlamps. Laurence held her arm a little too tightly.

"You like Adam?"

"Did I ever mention we had an affair in my final year?"

"When you knew me?"

"At the beginning."

"I never heard of him until tonight."

"I didn't think you wanted to know. I was never particularly secretive about it. Sometimes I came straight to your bed from his."

"That's disgusting."

"I was trying to make up my mind."

"And was sex the deciding factor?"

"No."

They turned up Simpson Street and she noticed the message on the church bulletin board. It read: 'The Reverend Harold Peach will deliver a sermon this Sunday on the question: Do you know?'

One of life's more profound questions. Perhaps she'd go. "Could you do me a favour?" She asked.

"What?"

"Whenever we run into an old boyfriend of mine, you always make rather vicious love when we get home. Do you think you could try and be gentle?"

"I want you to know that I'm there."

"Believe me, I know you're there. You make me feel that I'm not... that I could be anyone with a cunt. It's not a nice feeling."

"How did he make you feel?"

"Like a part of him."

"Why did you choose me?"

He stopped and sat on a low stone wall near their home. The snow on the mountain was melting in the thaw and small rivers raced down the hillside making the gutters glisten.

She remembered a similar night, nine years ago. She had been at Adam's flat. It was a single room filled with a lumpy hide-a-bed, a Baldwin grand, and several packing crates. There was a closet kitchen with a fridge full of beer and left over Chinese food, and a bathroom with cracked tiles and silverfish. There was no bath, only a shower cubicle. The hot

water was unreliable. When she arrived at Laurence's house, the house they lived in now, he was waiting with a table set in front of the fireplace, a catered dinner, chilled champagne, and a proposal of marriage.

"I loved you."

"Do you still love me?"

"She walked the few paces up the street to their place, and pushed open the heavy iron gate. He followed close behind.

"Well, do you?"

"Of course I do, silly. I'm here, aren't I?"

"For how long?"

She was rummaging in the purse for her keys and pretended not to hear.

He made love to her as though she were breakable, then fell asleep. She lay in bed for a long while then got up and ran a hot bath. Laurence often laughed at her, and said that all he had to do was keep her in baths and tea and she'd be happy. She washed thoroughly, removing all traces of the evening, and pulled on a nightie. It was flannel, long sleeved, and Laurence hated it. His taste ran to Fredrick's of Hollywood. She brushed her teeth, rinsed out her mouth, and exchanged the gold studs for sleepers, then turned out the light. Her head was still buzzing. She climbed the stairs to the attic. The familiar shapes of the fig tree and the piano shone in the moonlight. She sat, and began to play, quietly at first, but she quickly

lost herself in Debussy's moonlight. It embraced her like a lover. Like Adam. The crescendo lifted her, held her, and she drifted softly down with the flow of the music, sated in the dying chords.

She rose and was about to go to bed, when she realised she wasn't alone. Dimly outlined in the doorway stood Laurence. Andrew was beside him, clinging to his pyjamas. Laurence gave her a strange look, lifted Andrew up, and carried him downstairs. Her cheeks were burning. She walked over to the window and pressed one, then the other, against the cold glass. She was shaking.

When she finally went down, she pushed open the door to Andrew's room until a shaft of light from the streetlamp flooded across her face. The room was stuffy. She went over to the window and raised it a couple of inches. From this part of the house, she couldn't see the moon or the stars, only the light shedding its harsh glare on the wet street. The pillow under Andrew's cheek was damp with tears. He stirred when she sat on the bed, and she rubbed his back until his breathing was regular again. In the softness of sleep, he looked like any other child. She could almost forget that he stared at her from corners, was addicted to educational television, and liked his meat practically raw. In the shadows, the Lego construction took on interesting new aspects.

#

She was reluctant to go to bed. Laurence might still be awake and she didn't want to deal with him. She wanted to call Cosimo; talk to Cosimo, but it was two in the morning. Since the coming of Basil, he kept more or less regular hours. During the day, Basil, in his capacity of foundation secretary, screened all the incoming calls. She hated being screened by Basil. If she called now, he'd probably be the one to answer the phone. Taking a cigarette from a jar on the hall table, she wandered into the bathroom.

In the dim light from the window, the fixtures were soft familiar shapes. She sat on the hamper and watched the glow at the end of her cigarette without bothering to smoke. Hanging from the shower rod was the Chinese coat. Even in the dimness, an obscene blotch was visible down the front panel. Laurence had made it worse, but it wasn't his fault. She'd jumped with both feet and eyes wide open into his tacky-tacky box. He'd given what he had to give and she'd accepted. Cosimo's law of Stoidy: getting what you think you should have.

Now she had to figure out what she wanted, but how could she? She didn't even know who she was.

Chloe's shorts clung damply to her upper thighs. She sat in the blue leatherette chair and gloomed at the Jade tree in the corner. The oscillating fan whirred back and forth with steady persistence, cooling her somewhat. The room was dim. She had pulled the blinds. Lunch lay untouched on the bed-table. Tuna salad. The nurse had brought milk again; its whiteness almost phosphorescent. White like the girl's dress. Or her dress. Which? Stop thinking. Concentrate on something else. On Andrew. He was coming soon with a gift. Something he had made himself. With Jun's help. What could he have made. He wasn't particularly good with his hands, big awkward hands he hadn't yet grown into, although in the last half year he had shot past her in height.

That was better. Comb out your thoughts. Don't let them stray into that territory. Bach was good for that too. The tight elegant structure of the work left no room for stray emotions. She should go and play some Bach. An hour of Bach. An hour of classical purity. An hour of what she knew. An hour of absolute sanity.

But not here. Jane would come again. Forget it. The fan continued its limited journey, a foot in one direction, a foot in the other, and Chloe silently fingered the 'Chromatic Fantasy' on her knees.

"Happy Birthday!" Two of the younger nurses bounced in, holding a Joe Louis with a candle stuck in the centre. "Not hungry?" One of them picked up the lunch tray. Chloe snuffed

the candle between her thumb and forefinger and shook her head.

"And they gave you milk again. Oh dear. Would you like some tea? Iced?"

"No. No thank you. I'm not hungry. It's all right. Is there another piano in the building?"

They shook their heads in unison. So young in their white uniforms. A small blister had risen on the finger with which she had pinched the candle. Why would anyone want to devote their life to caring for people like crazy Jane? Or like her for that matter. They were looking at her strangely.

"Could you help me with something?" she asked.

All three women grasped the edge of the terra-cotta pot and lugged the Jade tree down the hall to the solarium. They had to pause three times and stretch their backs. The short trip took them ten minutes. Once it was installed in corner, the nurses left her, and she sat, and listened to the sound of its leaves rustling in the small breeze from the window. The room was temporarily quiet. In a few minutes, patients, having finished their lunch would crowd back in, chattering, playing cards, doing jig-saws. How long would it take them to register the green presence of the Jade tree? She figured that three days hence, the branches would be bare. Nothing could preserve it from the inmates here. Wonderful occupational therapy; leaf plucking. Chloe returned to her room, crumbled the Joe Louis in the toilet, and flushed it away.

#

The package looked as though it might contain a hat. A Federal Express sticker brightened one side. It was sitting on the middle of the bed. Chloe jiggled it. No sound, but it was heavy. She cursed her lack of fingernails. Someone had gone overboard on the tape. What could she use to open it? She cautiously lowered the box to the floor and sat on the warm linoleum. She stared at it for a long time. It was from Basil. What could Basil be sending her. Her desire to sate her curiosity was somewhat less than her desire to ask a nurse for scissors. It was marked FRAGILE. They had gone through the house together, Cosimo's house, and she had taken everything she had wanted. She shifted it onto her lap. The custom's declaration read: gift. He valued it at twenty-five-dollars. Probably a small marble sculpture, but twenty-five dollars? He was getting many thousands for his work. She leaned against the metal leg of the bed and wondered how she could get it open without calling the nurse. A hairpin? Could she pry the tape off with one?

Yes. Styrofoam packing chips littered the floor. Chloe remembered when they had used pop-corn. Much more practical. The birds ate it up. Like rice at weddings. She dug down to something hard wrapped in newspaper. A note was attached, in Basil's clean bold hand. 'I thought you might like this.' Just that. Basil was the only person she knew who was so basic, he was complex. She was glad they were finally friends. All those years of hating him, for what? For loving Cosimo? For Cosimo loving him back?

She hesitated, then began stripping away the layers of

newspaper to reveal a small bronze statue; she supposed a working model for a larger piece. It was of Cosimo. He was seated on the ground, cross-legged, and both hands were in the air, waving, gesticulating. He was telling a story, throwing his head back, laughing. The sinews of his neck were taut.

It was impressionistic, in the same manner as Rodin's sculpture of Balzac, capturing the very essence of Cosimo, his energy. The metal was cast such that the figure grew from the earth, yet was somehow, apart.

Chloe fondled the statue. She knew the photograph Basil had worked from. She had taken it herself, the summer they had all gone to Italy: Basil and Cosimo, she and Adam. They had stopped for a pic-nic lunch by the side of the road, in a poppy field, she seemed to recall. But she couldn't recall the story. He told so many stories. Oh, Cosimo. She closed her eyes and clutched at the statue, pressing it into her belly. Oh, Cosimo. And she rocked, back and forth, back and forth, following the rhythm of the oscillating fan.

6

A house, a home, a place in the country. Suddenly this had become a priority. The car sped over the Champlain bridge and Chloe dumped the toll quarters in the compartment near the shift. Adam had finally fallen victim to peer pressure: first the car, now this. And he expected to find it today. Dreamer. Christmas in the country with Andrew and Cosimo and Basil. The whole crew. Whoopie. So here they were, driving off to meet some real estate agent on this grey December day. She was perfectly happy in their rambling flat on Esplanade. She had been perfectly happy for three years. Why did he want to go and change things?

Adam was wearing his Olympic touque. The coloured rings were pulled down over his ears, and his fuzzy mitts covered half the steering wheel. It was freezing in the car. The hard winter roof was either in some Leyland warehouse in England, or in a ship's hold. A bitter wind pried between the soft hood and windshield while the ineffectual British heater pumped a draught of vaguely warm air at their feet. The back, where she could hear Andrew scratching away with his pencil, had to be even colder. Chloe wished she'd thought to bring hot chocolate.

— She pushed the toes of her boots up against the vent. You couldn't see the hills today. Overnight, the balmy,

prolonged autumn had become winter and an obscuring mist weighted the air. What were they called? Hilaire, Bruno, Orford... a vision of Mrs. Pratt with chalky fingers, the pointer slapping the map sprang to mind. The Monterey Hills. Were they volcanic? Chloe couldn't remember and lit a cigarette. Passing trucks threw up spray that the wipers cleared with a gentle repetitive thud. Back and forth. Thud, thud, thud. Mesmerizing. 'Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you join the dance?'

"Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you join the dance?"

"I will pull over, if you really want, and we could take a turn on the shoulder." Adam glanced quickly at her, smiled, then returned his attention to the road. One woolly mitt remained nestled between her legs. She clenched her thighs and held it there.

"I didn't know I was talking out loud."

"That's okay. I'm used to your left field utterings. Especially when you're tired."

The housing development ended abruptly at a railway overpass, and they were in farmland: row after row of furrows striped with snow. She recalled a few flakes tumbling idly past the window last night as they waited for Laurence to bring Andrew over; remembered sitting by the window overlooking the park, wrapped in a duvet, drinking coffee with Adam. Playing backgammon. Talking. Worrying. Till eleven, twelve, one.

Paper rustled in the back seat. (So-called. It was so

tiny even Andrew was forced to sit sideways. So small, it was only good for storing Adam's extensive collection of Broadway musicals, now scattered and jammed everywhere else: the glove compartment, door pockets, floor.) Chloe reached under the seat for a tape and pulled three out: "Bye-Bye Birdie", "Golden Boy", and "The Pyjama Game". Forget it. Grope a little more, a little farther under. A roll of life savers Andrew must have dropped. She tightened her fingers around the candy.

"How's Olga?" Adam accelerated and passed an oil truck. The pitch of the engine rose. How's Olga. So casual. How's the weather? How's your new pupil? The one with ten thumbs. How's Olga? The Parkinson's that had bit by bit eroded her motor capacities had reached its own pitch. Olga was dying. She lit a cigarette and placed it between his lips.

"About the same. I'm sorry I couldn't find her an older nurse. Someone she could really talk to. At least someone who liked music."

"Isn't this one any good?"

"Oh, she's alright. A bit overprotective. Olga made the girl bring her to the bar on Wednesday, to hear me play, and this kid insisted on wearing her uniform. Her uniform in the Ritz bar. These ghastly stockings and crêpe soled white shoes. Olga tried to pretend she was with someone else, and hooked onto these stockbrokers at the next table. After knocking back four or five vodkas, she began telling them about the night she performed for the Tzar and forgot to

wear her knickers. The stockbrokers ended up ordering the caviar!" She threw her head back on the seat and breathed in the scents of Gitaines and clean leather. (Adam regularly went over the seats with neat's foot oil.) "I like to see her get out. She goes stir crazy in that house. Adam...?"

"Yes?"

"I love you."

"You must be tired. I usually have to cook to get that out of you."

Concentrate on this. On the day. The car was thick with the essence of back roads and drive-ins, tree and highways. She ripped open the life-savers and popped one in her mouth, staring transfixed at the wipers, a metronome beating time to the music buzzing somewhere in the white noise of the engine. Olga's hand, blue-veined, rising, falling, shaking out of control. 'Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you join the dance?' And the highway, like the day, on and on.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you what happened at the bar yesterday."

"What happened at the bar yesterday?" He swerved to avoid a dead raccoon.

"I was playing the usual schlock. It was near five and the bar was pretty crowded. You know, the Friday afternoon slackers, and there was this man on the restaurant side finishing up tea with another man and two women. He was staring at me. I ignored him and proceeded to do my Mancini

medley. I was about halfway through 'The Days of Wine and Roses' when they all stood up and left."

"Thrilling."

"No. Wait. All but this man."

"Aha. The plot thickens."

"Can it. Anyway. He ushers the others out and sits behind me."

"How did you know?"

"Because he went behind me, dummo. Five minutes later, he moved again, to my direct right, still staring."

"Then he hit on you."

"No. Then ten minutes after that, he moved again, this time in front of me. Then again, not really staring... more examining, scrutinising. Do you know what I mean?"

"Oh yes. I don't think I like this man."

"It wasn't like that. Not like the lustful ogles you give me. More an assessment."

"Then he hit on you?"

"Then he got up, stuck a twenty in my glass, and asked me to play Bach's 'Chaconne'."

"In the Ritz bar?"

"Yup. I mean, by then I was deeply into Burt Bacharach."

"I can imagine. What did you do?"

"Well, he was leaning on the piano, watching my hands and waiting. I didn't know what to think. I looked around at all the stoidies, and nobody seemed to be paying much attention anyway, so I tied a bow on 'Raindrops Keep Falling

On My Head', and played what he asked."

"In the Ritz bar? Bach?"

"And nobody blinked. I don't think anyone noticed the change." Except that man, Chloe thought. Sebastian. The name rolled in her head, as exotic as... as those small Turkish cigarettes he smoked. In anyone else's hand they would have seemed an affectation, but somehow, they suited him, with his dark hair and eyes, and thickset muscular physique. A large star sapphire had flashed on his right hand. He had a devouring stare.

"What was this man like?" Adam asked.

"Your usual swarthy wog. You know... so correct it borders on ostentation. He's a theatrical agent/manager or something. Apparently he was following up some lead in Montreal—he's from New York—but it fell through. He was taking the evening flight back. I think he's interested in me."

"How so?"

"He said he was glad he's stopped in for a drink, that at least his trip wasn't a waste of time, and he gave me his card. He said to call."

"I'll call. I'll say I'm your manager. If he's on the level I'll find out."

"No," she said slowly. "I'll call. I can handle him." She was still clutching the life savers. "Andrew, I found your candy under the seat. I took one."

The noise of the pencil stopped and his small hand, red-mittened, reached between the seats with quiet thanks. His eyes were heavy. Laurence had finally delivered him

shortly after one. He had gone directly to the squash club after work, completely forgetting it was the first Friday of the month. So sorry. The boy, holding his overnight bag, waited half asleep in the dark hallway while Laurence made small talk, his eyes burning, the current woman standing in the shadows by the stairs sizing her up. Adam slammed coffee cups in the kitchen. She should be used to it by now. He came over often, when Adam happened not to be home, to discuss the boy. He would sit, on her piano stool, in his perfect suits, perfectly pressed, and casually mention his latest conquests; the trips he was planning, the piercing grey eyes, examining, calculating, desiring. What did he expect her to do? Fall on her knees and beg forgiveness? The divorce would be final in a few months, but she supposed none of this would change. Andrew was a fact. An eight year old fact writing a novel in the back seat of the car. God. Just thinking about Laurence had put her in a bad mood all over again.

"I hate this road. It is so dull."

"It's not as bad as the Ottawa one."

"Bad... worse... they both make me want to scream."

"Better get used to it."

"Resignation is not my forte. I mean, twice a week, fifty-two weeks a year, you can't be serious?"

He sucked air through his teeth but said nothing. He had grown very adept at avoiding arguments. She also hated being the sort of person people had to humour, but couldn't seem to

help herself. She handed him a quarter as they neared a toll. Window down. Toss. Window up. Their breath, faint white clouds.

"Light me another fag, would you?" He asked.

"Would I, could I, would I, could I, could I light a fag?"

The pack lay between the seats: the black silhouette of a gypsy dancing a segadille through a wreath of smoke. She'd have the pack duplicated in enamel and have it inscribed. Inscribed what? 'Smoke gets in your eyes.' Oh, the enticing smell of cigarette on car lighter. Lovely smell. The reason she'd first lit up. She closed her eyes and listened to the car noises. Drowsy. One of the lesser touted delights of hypothermia.

"So, Andy... whatcha writing?" Adam took up the slack. He always did. Andrew should've been his, not Laurence's. One of the reasons he wanted a house was to provide a home for the boy: marry her and petition for custody. Chloe drifted to the sound of their voices, transported, a child asleep on the back seat, her parents talking as they drove through the tunnel of night.

"When it rains, the worms think all the world's turned wonderful. Then the sun comes out."

"I always pick them up off the sidewalk and put them back in the mud." Offered Adam.

"There will always be more worms on more sidewalks."

"This is true."

"And they all get stepped on, run over or dehydrated."

"Why, Andy. Since when did you develop this fatalistic

attitude towards life? Are you studying worms in school?"

Chloe tucked her hands into her armpits and tried to stuff her toes into the heat vent. On a day like this, worms would get hypothermia. Wormsicles. She didn't know what her son was studying at school. Even in grade three, the selection of optional subjects seemed to equal the number of required. All he talked about was the computer in the library. At the last parent's meeting, the headmaster joked that he was considering buying a second one for the other students.

"We don't take biology 'till grade five."

"You have a very philosophical outlook for your age."

"We don't take philosophy 'till grade eight. I'm just writing about spring."

"Why?"

"Because I like having spring in my head." Andrew was silent for a moment. Chloe could smell the cherry life saver he was crunching. Why didn't children suck hard candy?

"Mom?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Daddy told me to tell you he moved his bed into your special room."

"It's not my room anymore, sweetheart. Daddy can do what he likes with it." Whatever he bloody well likes. The bed, placed no doubt, precisely where her piano had stood. She could imagine him humping his girlfriends under the skylight. Was that what he had in mind?

"He's letting me have his old room."

"That's nice, dear."

"And he's getting me my very own Apple."

Oh, perfect. Buy the kid a two thousand dollar toy to get him out of your hair for a few hours. What did Andrew want her to say? That Laurence was a wonderful, generous man? The best father a boy could have? And when you're old enough, you will be shipped off to the finest boarding school, the most prestigious summer camp. Bravo, Laurence. Chloe opened her eyes. Andrew was moaning.

"Mommy, my stomach hurts."

Shit. She had him two weekends a month, and she couldn't even remember the Gravel.

"Didn't you dose him up?" Adam sounded annoyed.

"I forgot. Mea culpa... mea culpa... mea culpa."

"I think there's a bag in the glove compartment."

She dug through the mess of tapes, maps, insurance, registration, tire pressure gauge, corkscrew, sunglasses, and straws still in their wrappers to find a plastic bag left over from the time they went to see 'Star Wars' at the drive-in. She unlatched the seat belt and leaned into the back where a pale Andrew hugged his tummy. The detached thought wandered through her head, that there was something vaguely incongruous about vomiting into a bag printed with a happy face. He performed a laboured retch.

"Pull over. He'll be better in front."

"You can't fit in the back." Poor Adam. A blotch on his

perfect day.

"I'll sit sideways."

"We'll pull off at the next exit. There'll be a drugstore somewhere."

Andrew lifted his head and whimpered, his face flushed and beaded from exertion. The same oil truck inched past and the tiny car shuddered in the suction of its slipstream.

He was asleep, curled up on the back seat breathing through his mouth like a baby. The ginger hair fell over his forehead and there was a dappling of freckles on his cheeks that only appeared when the weather was cold. Chloe had wrapped him in the old plaid car rug that they used for pic-nics. Bits of grass and burrs clung to the wool.

The radio became static as the road took a broad curve around Mt. Orford. There was more snow here. The trees were heavy with it, and the orderly formation of hydro poles faded into the cloud shrouded summit. She switched the radio off and reached for the tape at her feet. One did not talk music in the car. There was enough of that at home. She wouldn't dare speculate aloud on this man, Sebastian and his offer: whether or not there was a legitimate career waiting for her at the end of a phone line. It was an unstated rule. A suspension of worldly care. She slipped the cartridge into the tape deck and pushed FWD. The jazzy overture to 'West Side Story' pressed softly through the speakers. A suggestion of steamy New York streets warmed her a little. 'When you're a Jet, you're a

Jet all the way... from your first cigarette, to your last dyin' day....'

Adam slowed for the final toll, and the car temperature dropped again. Chloe glanced back at Andrew, still asleep, and turned the volume up. The wonder of antihistamines. She should have taken a pill last night, after the scene with Laurence. She was so worked up and pre-occupied with her own irritation, she failed to notice that the child was disturbed. But Adam had noticed. After crashing his last saucer into the dish-rack, he proceeded to mix hot milk and honey in Andrew's penguin mug, helped him into his pyjamas, and read 'Treasure Island' to him until he fell asleep. Chloe could only fume and watch the tennis courts across the street turn white.

Adam sang along to the tape. Typical composer. Music coming out his ears, but he couldn't hold a tune to save his life. They turned onto 55 South, and she watched him framed by the window and the snow covered fields. He was basking in an aura of contentment, surrounded by his 'family'.

'Make of our hands, one hand,
Make of our hearts, one heart....'

The tune rose in Chloe's throat. Singing like breathing, was so simple. Adam was waiting. They were a natural duo from the first moment they touched. Thirteen years, culminating in this. For thus it was and shall be evermore. Amen. He took for granted the inevitability of their us-ness, our-ness, we-ness. Did she take him for granted? She supposed she did. He expected it. Who else? She didn't have friends... not really. How many

we-nesses in her life? Cosimo, certainly, and Andrew, inevitably. And Olga. Olga, who was dying. The letting go was so much harder than the grabbing onto. Teacher and student. Yes, there was a we there. And so much love. But she loved Adam too, so why not marry him? What was wrong with her? Why couldn't she resign herself to being happy with Adam? She automatically lit him another cigarette. Adam, Adam. Smiling, smoking and singing. One of the blessed of the earth. Even Cosimo was routing for them. He always had been. What was her problem? The finality of it? Well, she'd divorced Laurence. She could only try with Adam. She touched his cheek. He hadn't shaved and the faint red stubble pricked her fingers.

"Do I make you happy?"

He glanced at her, surprised. The car swerved.

"Sometimes..." He picked his way through the words, weighing, selecting, discarding. "...I forget that we are separate individuals. You are so within me, that I can continue a thought from last week... last year, and you will know exactly what I am talking about. On the odd occasion when you go blank on me, I am genuinely surprised." He flicked an ash into the pile of quarters. She had upset him.

"I fell in love with you the first day you walked into my class. How's that for corny?"

"But you were screwing around."

"Only after you started sleeping with Laurence."

The tape clicked off. Adam ejected it and slid in 'The Wiz'. Ease on down the road. No more said.

#

They parked the car in front of the town general store. Adam pulled up his sleeve to check the time.

"We're early. Francoeur won't be here 'till twelve-thirty."

"You mean we could've slept longer?"

"Stop griping, woman. Be honoured that the crème de la crème, the ne plus ultra of estate agents is deigning to take us on at all. Tip me off when you spot his Bentley."

"Bentley?"

"Actually... a Mercedes, but let's not split hairs."

"Who's paying who?"

Chloe noticed that Adam was watching two women tugging bundled babies in sleds. The runners left crisp tracks in the snow.

"I had no idea selling real estate was so lucrative."

"All the rubes are getting out and selling at vast profit to us big city suckers. So..." He unfolded a map of the Eastern Townships and spread it across the dashboard.

"... where do you want to live?"

"Esplanade facing the park."

"Did I hear you say Ham Sud?" He pointed to a name.

Chloe leaned over and traced a line along a black secondary road. "No. I have an inexplicable yearning to plant potatoes in St. Adolphe de Dudswell. Can't you see me in a white peasant blouse and paisley skirt, standing in the field with my hoe, up to my ankles in aphids?"

"That might prove difficult. All you're going to find

there are lime kilns and crushers. It's a quarry."

"How do you know that?"

"My grandfather lived in Scotstown, and when I first got my driver's licence, I cruised all these roads..."

"... looking for girls."

"No. Presumptuous little twat. Looking for perfect fishing."

"Did you find it?"

"Yup. Ways Mills. There is a stream there, and if you build the campfire close enough, the trout leap right into the frying pan." He paused and lit a cigarette while savouring the memory of obliging fish. "I'll take Andy this spring. Do you think he'll like fishing?"

"If he could program his Apple to cast."

"Oh, look!" He pointed to a spot near the edge of the paper. "St. Herménégilde. What would Birks do with that?"

"Engraved gothic lettering on white paper with a broad black border."

He wrinkled his nose. "I would've thought blue. Chloe Carothers of St. Herménégilde. What about Sts. Martyrs Canadiens? Were they martyred there? The only Canadian martyrs I know are Brébeuf and..."

"Lalèment."

"Right."

"And one would be buried in Bury." She circled her cigarette, zeroing in on the name and burning a hole in the map.

"St. Remi de Tingwick." he countered.

"... a close personal friend of St. Marguerite de Lingwick."

"... who read sonnets to each other by moonlight in the ruins of Piopolos."

"What are you two talking about?" Andrew poked his head between the seats and rubbed his eyes. "Are we here yet?"

"We are indeed, but somewhat in advance of the swamp salesman."

They glanced down the empty street. Adam shook his head.

"Busy little burg."

"Like you said: the great urban exodus... or would it be a rural exodus if they were leaving?"

"Beats me. A bit of both."

"I'm thirsty." Andrew threw his blanket off.

"Well, I think there's time to Buvez some Coca-Cola."

Andrew giggled. Perhaps it was telling that only in conjunction with Adam could she see the child and not just some peculiar midget fruit of her womb. He tied the hood under the boy's chin and helped him on with his mittens. Red wool. Laurence must have picked them out: and the suit of a sleek silver fabric that made him look like a small spaceman. The colour had returned to his cheeks and he didn't seem so tired. She raised her hand to touch him but he turned as Adam opened the door.

It was a real old fashioned general store. Andrew ran ahead and dashed down an aisle, shedding clumps of snow that

melted on the grey wood. He vanished around a corner to reappear a moment later clutching a pair of snowshoes. They were laid in her hands like an offering. No straps. Chloe gazed with an air of futility over shovels, coveralls, brooms, displays of patent medicines, but could see none. Two men were playing chequers in front of the Franklin stove, the board perched (as a concession to time) on a plastic cannister bearing the label of a chemical fertilizer. The air was filled with the crackling scent of maple. No, no, not real, this. This was not her life. She stood, detached and alienated, as though she were watching television. Any moment a commercial would come on and she would get herself a cup of tea. Adam entered the frame and asked where he might find drinks. The man who answered had very few teeth and pointed as he smiled, to a cooler behind a rack of tyre chains. Then he turned back to the game and executed a quadruple jump. The second man sighed. His earflaps stood out at right angles to his cap, and he didn't appear too bright. Adam handed Andrew a cream soda, and Chloe gripped the varnished sinews of the snowshoes. There was a smell of animal about them, still. The second man grinned and waved at the child. He had no fingers on the hand; only a thumb protruding from a fleshy pink ball. Andrew smiled awkwardly and sipped his drink. Chloe shuddered and tried not to think about anything happening to her own hands. She knew how not being able to play had affected Olga's life. She couldn't move to the country. Who would watch over Olga? Hired nurses were no substitute for her daily visits. She

flexed her own long fingers, threaded through the webbing of the snowshoes, the tips an angry red. Adam stood beside her and offered a sip of root beer. The fingerless man slid a piece to its new position with his thumb, and the first man jumped him again. He ran his tongue along his lower lip, then spoke.

"Seen any elves lately?" A tentative push farther into the black territory. Andrew's jaw dropped. Six red pieces remained on the board. The first man leap-frogged two of them as he answered.

"Yeah. One jumped on my shovel as I was clearin' snow off my porch. I made a box for it, you know, lined it with straw to keep it warm, but it wouldn't eat, so I had to let it go. They're like wild animals."

"I tried that once too. But it didn't work. You have to let them go."

Elves? What sounded like elves? Wolves? But no one would try to keep a wolf in a straw lined box, thought Chloe.

"Yeah. You have to let them go." The toothless man had now captured all but two of the reds, and those were trapped in corners. She examined their faces for some indication of a conspiracy. Elves?!!

"Didja get your roof fixed?" A devil-may-care leap into hostile ground. Jump. One red.

"Yeah. Shirley helped me for a few days. 'Till it got cold. Then I couldn't get him out of the bar at his hotel." A circling manoeuvre.

"Sounds like Shirley. How'd you manage?" Only one free square. Another sigh as the thumb pushed the last remaining red onto it.

"A bottle of Benedictine." Jump.

"Ah." The looser stood and adeptly flicked open the door to the wood stove with his foot, then jammed a new log in with his good hand. Country life. Whatever was Adam thinking of?

Chloe turned down the narrow passage between the canned goods, to the rear of the store where she found a box of leather straps beside some dusty work boots. When she returned to the front of the store, the toothless man was standing behind the counter punching the cash register. They paid as a red Mercedes slowed to a halt behind the M.G..

Adam smiled and she gritted her teeth. The Mercedes dissolved into dips, around corners, winding and twisting, a dot on the white road, no different from the white fields. The landscape heaved under its snow cover: irregular piles of rocks cleared from the farmland, abandoned haystacks, collapsed outbuildings. Twilight zone. Andrew was staring hard out the window, his papers discarded, scouring the white world for elves.

Chloe stared, dismayed. Tarpaper from an unfinished wall of the clapboard bungalow flapped in the wind. Not exactly the rustic Bavarian hunting lodge of her imaginings.

Francoeur leaned against her door and made a gesture of dismissal with his elegantly gloved hand. She rolled the window down until she could smell his cologne. He smiled with too perfect, too even teeth and patted her hand familiarly.

"This," he explained, a smooth and practised explanation #26 for the troubled and hesitant prospect, "is nothing. Taxes are so much lower on an unfinished house. So many... are never 'finished'." He shrugged an apologia for his countrymen, not quite his countrymen. Wink. "An easy matter to put right."

Such excellent English. The accent might have been an afterthought, assumed for its potential to charm. He opened the door and took her elbow. Andrew and Adam were already scrambling up the front steps: cinderblocks, artfully arranged. She didn't have to live here. No one could force her to live anywhere she didn't want to live, so she may as well look at it. He jangled the keys and guided her through the narrow path in the snow.

Chloe stood alone in the kitchen. Francoeur had led her through the corridor of cracked linoleum and ravaged light fixtures, depositing her in the bare room. All the appliances had been torn from the walls, and a single lightbulb dangled from a hole in the ceiling. He switched it on and abandoned her without offering any excuses on the condition of the house. She could hear the footsteps and voices of the others echoing from tiny room to tiny room. The emptiness

crowded in on her. And the faces.

Someone had painted strange primitive figures on the surfaces of the room. Bizarre creatures cut off at the torso, where a stove or dishwasher might have been. She could identify a woodsman wearing an embroidered peasant's smock, holding a hatchet. Blood dripped from the stump of his wrist, while a hawk carried the hand away in his talons. On another wall, a fat woman beat clothes on a rock in the river while a baby grimaced beneath the shallows, reaching up, while its mother signaled to someone in the other direction. Limbs connected oddly with the bodies, growing from impossible angles, from distorted frames. An indifferent diety occupied a corner of the ceiling and extended his arm between the imperfect stars and twisted birds flying in agony around his flaming sword. The angel of death. She had once been to a mountain village in Italy, and seen the same thing. People being crushed by carts, falling off cliffs... and always the archangel with his sword, standing in the sky, smiling, directing. Cosimo had laughed, and dragged her through the whole museum taking tally of how many died by what. He hadn't known that she was fighting her horror. Her feet were taking root into the leaves and flowers on the floor, trampled to an indistinct greyness. A man pinned under a tractor reached up to the sky. Chloe forced herself to walk to the back door, and desperately pushed back the snow with the feeble aluminium of the doorframe. She forced her steps to the car and sat, leaving the door open. Three matches blew out before she could light a cigarette. Why didn't they hurry up?

There was no life — no movement except the tarpaper snapping against the house. A section tore loose and sailed erratically over the bleak treeless fields, cartwheeling in the wind.

"Well, what do you think, Clo? Should we make them an offer?" Adam crossed his hands over the wheel as he negotiated a sharp curve. Chloe played with the fringe on her scarf. One end was completely braided. Andrew threw a crumpled paper at Adam's head. It bounced off the touque and landed on the dash.

"The place was a toilet." he said.

"Did you catch the morbid masterpieces on the walls?" Adam asked. Andrew made a rude noise, and threw another piece of paper, this time at Chloe. She smoothed it out on her knee. It was blank. "I agree with Andrew," she added. "The place was a toilet."

"Then it's unanimous." He laughed. "But take heart. They always work this way. It's in the training manual. Show the pigeons a toilet first, so the one you show next, the one you really want to sell them, looks like a palace in comparison. Then, just to clinch the deal, you show them yet another toilet: toilets outnumbering habitable abodes two to one."

"A convenient ratio. Great M.O.."

The wheels spun on a patch of ice and the depressing whine of non-traction was absorbed by the fir trees pressing into the narrow logging road. How did trucks get through?

"Get behind the wheel. I'll push."

"I'll push." she said.

"No, I'll push." He insisted.

"Look. The last time I tried to drive this thing I stripped the gears."

"Then don't touch the gears."

"I said I'll push for God's sake." She quickly opened the door and stepped to the rear of the car. The scent of pine was overwhelming. She took a deep breath and exhaled a billow of white. A pale sun glimmered behind the grey. There was a gentle rustling in the woods to her left. Some small animal. Maybe an elf. Andrew made a face through the rear window as she pushed. She made one back. She would, she decided, refuse to see the third house. They would check into Hovey Manor, sit in front of the fire, and get blitzed on hot rum toddies.

Francoeur led them off the road onto a track bordered by pink granite pillars. A tangle of leafless vine choked them, and the iron gates hung derelict in the open position. The path had recently been cleared, probably for their benefit, and spruce branches brushed and scraped the sides of the car. The road was repeated in a darkening line of sky over their heads. Adam switched the lights on.

"We can chop our own Christmas tree from our own woods."

"Hell, we could chop Christmas trees for the city of Sherbrooke and pay for the place." Chloe blew on her fingers. It was suddenly damp. Andrew blew on the window and drew little people on the glass.

"I betcha there are elves in these woods."

"And nice fresh venison." The headlights caught a pair of green luminous eyes through the trees, and branches shook as the deer fled. They saw Francoeur's tail lights in the distance. The forest thinned and they entered an area of second growth sapling birch. The house was on a slight rise overlooking a lake. Day hung about the clearing as the snow that softened the contours of the slate roof. She could count three chimneys. The house itself, was of the same pink granite as the gateposts, mellowed by the same growth of ivy. Chloe was the first one out of the car when they pulled up behind the Mercedes. Francoeur just sat behind the wheel and watched as she crossed the huge roofed porch, kicking the powder snow into clouds with her boots. She faced the door then turned and motioned to him. The lake shone under a thin sheet of ice. There was a quiet lapping, and the small noise of pine needles rubbing together, a gentle rushing like the tide at sunset. Adam and Andrew waited beside her as Francoeur tried the locks. He kept taking out the wrong keys; shaking his head, clicking his tongue.

"Gee. I 'ope I 'ave de right keys with me." He shrugged as they stamped their feet with cold and impatience. The latch finally clicked and the door swung open. They stood on the threshold and gaped into the darkness.

"You go in. I'm going to open de storm shutters."

"Where are the light switches?" she asked as she patted her hand vainly down the wall inside the door. Francoeur paused

and did a vague Gallic ritual with his hands.

"Didn't I mention it? There's no electricity." And with as much haste as could be accomplished with dignity, he vacated the porch and whisked around the side of the house. They exchanged woeful glances as the shutters banged. A column of light poured across the vastness before them.

The main living area was open to the beamed rafters, and wrought iron chandeliers hung suspended; one at each end of the hall. There was a large fireplace in the centre of the room with many-armed candle sconces on either side of an old silvery mirror. Chloe touched the delicately sculpted heron pointing its beak to the ceiling, that rose, wings outstretched, from a circle of iron tendrils. They still held candle stubs. Francoeur yanked open another shutter and waved in at them with the light. A gallery ran along one length of wall, and she supposed the closed door led to the bedrooms. Andrew, who had run up the stairs, called over the wooden balustrade.

"I'm going to explore up here, okay?"

"Okay. But be careful."

He pushed open the door and faded into the darkness. His footsteps rang hollowly back through the emptiness. They'd have to get some carpeting. God! What was she thinking? There wasn't even any power. Adam stood by the window, staring out at the lake.

"Clo... come here... look... there aren't any other houses."

The opposite shore was a rock overhang, and the deep pine

forest crept to the very precipice, thick and brooding. The indistinct sun hung low over a line of trees.

"That's strange. I hope he's not trying to sell us the entire lake." Adam lit them both cigarettes and they turned to look at the room. It wasn't as big on second glance, but gave that effect from its emptiness and great height.

"How long a commute would it be?"

"Two hours... a little longer maybe." He put his thumbs together and framed a spot beneath the gallery. "We could put the Christmas tree there. A fifteen footer."

"You don't know if you can afford this little hovel yet."

"Aw. Who else but a mentally deficient composer would want a house on the far side of nowhere with no electricity?"

"No one that I can think of. Perhaps a cult. It can't have been empty too long. The walls are in good shape. What about heat?"

"Fires. No shortage of firewood."

"I suppose you'll chop it?"

"With my trusty Black and Decker."

"There was a piano here."

"Say what?"

"Look." Chloe indicated an area on the floor framed by two windows. A thin network of ivy spread over the leaded glass. She imagined a rich green shade with pencil beams of sunlight dancing on the spot. A crash came from the back of the house. Francoeur must have let himself in through a side

door.

"See there? The dents in the floor. A baby grand. And played a lot. See where the bench and pedals were." The pine floor was deeply scored in one specific area.

"We could put your piano here, and leave mine in the city. We'll have to take a smaller apartment anyway."

"What about my pupils? What about my lessons with Olga?"

"Schedule them for the days I have classes. Common... can't you see us sitting here of a hot summer evening, on the terrace... is there a terrace?" The shutters on the door facing the lake were unopened, but from the window was an unmistakable flatness and what appeared to be snow covered steps leading onto the lawn. "There. Fate. The coals of the barbeque will still be glowing as we lounge on canvas sling chairs throwing ice cubes at each other. Then one of us will strip off her clothes and dash for the lake, followed closely by me."

"We'd have to get a carpet for the room, or the sound'll bounce all over the place."

"Romantic."

"Hey, just a sec. What about my job at the bar?"

"It's not important. We can manage without the money."

"That's not the point. I like performing."

"Burt Bacharach in a bar?"

"It's something." She walked over to the fireplace, tilted the screen and tossed her butt in the grate. Adam stayed by the window and drummed his fingers on the sill

impatiently. She had never known him to want anything as much as he wanted this house. April was the start of his sabbatical year and he wanted isolation and quiet to concentrate on his composing.

"Look, you can still give concerts in schools and church basements." He was admiring the lustre of the floors and seemed unaware of what he was saying. Was that what he thought? She touched the mantle. A thin layer of frost coated the stone. She scraped at it with her fingernail.

"What about this man from New York? Maybe he can do something to launch me."

"Don't count on it. Even if he is legit, what could he hang your career on? You're thirty-three years old and you've never done a competition. You've never even performed with an orchestra. There are a lot of ambitious twenty-year-olds out there with as much talent as you." She tried to avoid his eyes as he held her shoulders. He wasn't telling her anything she hadn't gone over in her head, time and time again, but this was the first time he had stated what was patently obvious. She allowed him to hold her, pressing her cheek against his bulky jacket as he rocked her slightly.

"We'll invite Cos and Basil. Christmas in the deep woods ought to appeal to them. And as for Olga, she can have her own room. Two rooms if she wants," he offered.

"Cosimo...yay!" Andrew slid down the bannister, a silver missile, and dropped to an ungraceful heap on the floor. "I dibs the room in the tower. It's neat. Can I go out and try my

snowshoes? Please," he added. the question was addressed to Adam, who was beaming with visions of Christmas trees and stuffed goose, feeling kindly unto all the earth. He swooped Andrew up in his arms, and kissed him on the forehead, much to the boy's embarrassment.

"Sure. Scout. But don't go near the water."

He disappeared for a few minutes, then appeared waddling across the wide open space. He tripped once, then pulled himself up again and decided to skirt the trees at the edge of the woods, shaking the snow from the branches and letting it slide over his head. She glanced down at the mantle and realised that she had scratched the words, 'Will you join the dance?'

Francoeur hauled open a sliding door at the end of the room and entered with a thermos and three cups. She hurriedly obliterated the words with her glove. He poured coffee and took a position in the centre of the room.

"I have one more house I can show you today, but we should hurry before dark."

Chloe glanced at Adam who was sipping his steaming drink. He mumbled into his mug. "So tell me why there aren't any other houses. What's the problem?"

"The rest of the lake is private land, owned by the lumber company. A reserve where the executives can hunt and fish. There's a lodge on the other side, but it's set about half a mile back from the lake." He paused and cast an eye around the room. "This place was owned by a family, who built way before the lumber company bought up the land, but they

refused to sell, and when de ole man died last year, 'is nephew tried to get them to take de property off 'is 'ands but they weren't interested anymore. Now he just wants to get rid of it. He lives in Tuscon."

"How much does he want for the place? I mean, there's no electricity." Chloe stamned her feet. The damp was creeping into her bones. Why hadn't Francoeur thought to set a fire?

"My brother-in-law could wire up dis place in two weeks. There's a power line runs right through dis property, a quarter of a mile away. Electric 'eat. Lots of electricity in Quebec." He winked. Adam put the plastic cup on the windowsill.

"How much?"

"The owner has never seen de place. 'e 'ad a lawyer auction off de furniture. 'e wants to dump it."

"How much?" Adam insisted.

"Fifty."

"Fifty?" Adam's expression of incredulity made her choke back a laugh. It was misinterpreted by Francoeur who hastily added:

"But they'll take forty."

Adam had thirty in savings and fifteen in an R.H.O.S.P., and she had saved all her earnings as a director of the Delaney foundation. Granted, that wasn't much but it would pay for the wiring. Adam poked his head through the door to the kitchen.

"How much would your brother-in-law charge? Just heating and appliances. No lights."

"There are government standards. You wire a house, you wire de whole house. Inspectors come."

"Oh ya. Well...?"

"Things are quiet in de winter. 'e'll give you a good deal." Francoeur poured himself another cup. Adam paced.

"If he can start Monday, and have the work completed in two weeks, you've got your commission."

Chloe left the room as they were shaking hands. The sun had sunk behind the trees, and slashes of pink and mauve streaked the sky. The snow was pure blue. She followed the shallow pools of Andrew's snowshoe prints through the low ridges and shadows of deeper indigo. The windows of the house mirrored a pastel sunset.

"Andrew..." She cupped her hands to her mouth.

"Andrew... Andrew..." The echo bounced off the cliff across the lake. The answer returned, muffled, from the depths of the woods.

"Over here." A moment later, he sprang from the trees, and raced toward her, mysteries in his eyes.

"I found an elf." He panted clouds of air looking hopefully up at her. She shoved her hands in her pockets. Why didn't children feel the cold?

"This is such a great place. There's an old boathouse over there with canoes and everything. Do you think it belongs to here? I saw the elf near there. Come on. Hurry. I'll show you." He tugged at her arm. She reluctantly dragged her feet in the direction he was pulling her. She really

just wanted to stay there and watch the sky change colour.

"What did you see?"

"I'm sure it's an elf. There's steam coming out from under this pine tree. All the branches are buried in the snow, so there's a little cave near the trunk."

Chloe yanked his arm and turned him toward her.

"You didn't crawl in, did you?"

"No. I just watched the steam. There was a poof, then nothing, then another poof, then nothing. Maybe there was a whole family. I guess they don't need to be warm, eh? We could leave food out for them. What do elves eat?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea." A sprinkling of snow wet her face as he pulled her through the trees. Once in the woods, the space opened up. Lower limbs had been cleared to a height of seven feet, and a snowless blanket of pine needles cushioned their steps. Andrew had shed the snowshoes.

The lake shone dimly between the trunks of the trees. They approached a clearing. Chloe could identify Andrew's footprints in the snow, and others. Some animal. A dog, perhaps, or a wolf. They led to a drooping spruce, and away from it. Her heartbeat quickened, and she leaned against the flaking white paint of the boathouse. Andrew released her hand and ran to investigate. He crawled under the branches until all she could see was the condensation from his breath.

"There's nothing here!" He cried. And thank God, she thought. His rosy face peeked out the hole.

"The elves ran away." He looked so disappointed, she

rushed over and scooped him up in a hug. Who would have believed a blasé eight-year-old could be so credulous about fairy creatures?

"Maybe they'll come back. We'll be spending Christmas here. Ten days."

"Really?" His eyes widened.

"Your entire vacation. You can pick out the tree and Adam'll chop it down, and Cosimo will come..."

"...and Basil," he added.

"And even Basil. We'll decorate the tree, and you can have the tower room... is there really a tower?" she asked.

Andrew pushed away and waved his arms excitedly.

"Ya, really. Come. I'll show you. There are little slitty windows, like for bows and arrows, and gold stars painted on the ceiling." He tugged at her arm again.

"Whoa. Cool it. Don't get your shirt in a knot. The house isn't going anywhere. Let's walk over there and look at the sunset. See how it's reflected in the ice?"

"Adam said not to go near the water."

She took his hand. "That's okay. I'm here to fish you out should it prove necessary, although I wouldn't advise a dip just now." She bent down and tickled him through the snowsuit. He giggled. They'd have to get a washer and drier too. She wasn't about to pummel clothes on rocks. And Adam would have to help with the cleaning. She heard his voice through the trees.

"Chlo-eeee!" He sounded like an exotic bird. The call

echoed over the water.

"Over here. Follow the prints."

The clouds had deepened to red and purple, the deeper blue above penetrated by a prickling of stars. They neared the edge of the lake. She could hear the crunch of pine needles. Francoeur had to be with him; Adam was very lightfooted.

"Mommy, what's that?" Andrew squeezed her hand and pointed to an object in the shallows around a large boulder.

"Don't know. I'll go and see. Stay here." Chloe seated him on the stair of the boathouse, and stepped onto the snow and sand, carefully picking her way between the icy rocks. From the corner of her eye she saw Adam and Francoeur emerge from the trees.

"Clo... What are you doing?"

"Attention, Madame....c'est glissant!"

She stared. Thin white hair, mixed with snow, fell across the sleeping face, and a hand; fingers curled delicately upward, sparkled with frost. The unfrozen water at the very edge of the lake slapped peacefully against the leg, and the checked red jacket was coated with a sheen of ice. Francoeur took her arm and steered her away from the body.

"I'm sorry.... I'm so sorry. One of the lumber executives... he disappeared a few weeks ago... Mr. Carothers... I'm so sorry."

Andrew jumped off the step and ran to her, but she turned away, to Adam, and left it to Francoeur to reassure the child.

She continued to stare at the form in the water. Francoeur rescued the snowshoes that Andrew had propped against a tree, and Adam led her away from the shore. Together, they walked into the darkness of the trees.

Chloe had changed back into a dress for the afternoon session, and Andrew's visit. Dr. Homsy tilted his chair, both hands clasped behind his head, and watched her poke through his bookcase, reading titles. Mostly bound copies of psychiatric journals. And dirty. Her finger was black.

"Don't the housekeeping staff dust?"

"Probably not." The chair creaked as he sat up. "You haven't made a grab for my Rothmanns yet."

"Don't worry. I will."

"You seem tired."

"It's the heat. Listen to them out there. The pool must be packed."

"Why don't you go swimming later."

"I hate crowded pools. You want to float on your back and people keep smashing into you as they do laps. Fanatics in goggles."

"You were on the mountain this morning."

"Yes."

"Nice walk?"

"Very nice, thank you."

"You were gone a very long time."

"Because I took a very long walk." Jesus. The heat was getting to her. She looked at the couch. What the Hell? It was easy to see why the siesta was an integral part of the tropical day. " " At twelve noon the natives swoon and no

further work gets done, but mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the mid-day sun'." Wonderful couch. Why had she avoided such an obvious luxury for so many weeks? Why, she could have slept through the sessions.

"You have a lovely voice. I didn't know you could sing too. That's Noel Coward, isn't it?"

"Yup."

"I was told that you were upset when you came back."

"Pardon?" Why couldn't she simply drift off? What was he on about now? The banal exchange had been a blind. An interrogation lurked within.

"From your walk. You were... dazed... when you returned."

"Give me a smoke." So much for a nap. She sat up and walked over to the desk. Dr. Homsy handed her a pack and some matches. For only five dollars, she could send away for a bundle of J.F.K. memorial stamps. She balanced on the edge of the desk, facing the window. There were splashes and screams through the trees. The pool was open to patients, staff, families of staff, and, it seemed, anyone who could sneak through the fence. She had gone once, on a rainy day. She hadn't planned on swimming, but the empty, secluded pool exerted an irresistible appeal. She stared past the Doctor's neatly trimmed hair to the poplar. The silvery leaves shook and unseen sparrows twittered in the depth of its shadows. From somewhere, came the strains of a violin.

"I have to get back to my room. My son is coming to visit." No. No violin. It stopped. Just the leaves,

and the birds and the splashes and the shrieks.

"Don't go yet." He touched her wrist as she butted the cigarette and stood. He was sitting straight up in his chair.

"My son..."

"The desk nurse will tell him you're in session. He'll wait. What happened on your walk? Why were you upset?"

Chloe played with the butt for a moment then sat in the other chair. The doctor relaxed and leaned back again.

"I began to remember... but not enough."

"What did you remember?"

"A little girl in a white dress."

"Do you think this was the day you...?"

"I don't know. Yes. Yes. It was. At first I thought I was remembering something about myself."

"When you ran away to New York."

"Yes. But it wasn't."

"No?"

"No."

"Don't try so hard. Close your eyes..... get into a comfortable position." He nodded and smiled. She reached for another cigarette then decided against it. He held his hands in the praying pose and waited for her to continue. There it was again. Clear and distinct. A violin. Someone was playing on the mountain, and every so often, the wind would carry a phrase, a snatch of melody. She closed her eyes, and listened. The hospital faded.

"It was blistering. Still is. Long bloody heat wave. I was downtown. All the offices must have emptied out onto the street. Friday afternoon. Three-thirty. I cut through alleys and buildings to avoid the crowd on St. Catherine Street. The sun was just glaring off cars in the parking lots. I walked behind Christ Church Cathedral. People were lolling on the grass. It's about the only real oasis down there. The grass had been cut. I can smell it now, but I couldn't then. So evocative, the smell of freshly cut lawns. It brings up the memory of lying in bed when it was still light. I must have been very young. Maybe it was in the morning. Maybe both. My early memories have a tendency to fuse. Can you remember the last time you heard the sound of a hand-pushed mower?"

The doctor shrugged and shook his head.

"I was in such a hurry to get out of the heat, that I raced across the green. I wanted to get into the air-conditioning at Morgan's. No. The Bay. Maybe that day began to fuse with other days. We used to shop at Morgan's. I was in a hurry. All the people on the grass seemed to be eating ice cream cones. A crazy bagpiper in full regalia, even a sporran, was blowing 'My Bonnie Lassie', and someone else was doing a highland fling. It was so hot....

"There was a little girl standing, watching, in a white dress. She had pigtails, and was holding a little white straw purse. She was alone, or at least no one was with her. But she didn't look lost. She opened her purse and

threw fifty cents into the tam. It was a fifty cent piece.

"I went onto the store, downstairs to the liquor commission. Jun was away... I bought two bottles of Asti Spumante. I was going to use it for fruit cocktail. Sebastian was coming up. I was downtown buying food for dinner. A cold dinner: vichyssoise, steak tartare, marinated salad, aspic. No one believes I can cook. It was so hot. The bag was heavy. I went into the metro station.

"The metro was even hotter than outside. And more crowded. All these bodies, scurrying like insects. There was a current headed to the trains. Then I heard the violin.

"The place was usually chock full of buskers, but there was only this one. It was... this sounds so corny... but it was ethereal. He was playing Vivaldi, and the music came flying off the walls, a rich, mournful solo. I didn't stop walking, but I looked over, and he caught my eyes. The boy couldn't have been more than eighteen. He was wearing a striped T shirt and jeans; a clean face; pure. He held my eyes. I couldn't look away. People were making detours around him, away from him. There were a few nickels and quarters in his case, and a dollar bill he'd probably put there himself.

"This all happened in a few seconds. I continued to walk. I looked into my bag, and the tearing away was like a physical pain. He was still staring at me, playing his violin at me. I wedged my hands down the side of the packages and found my wallet... and walked. The sound was stabbing me.

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He was painting pictures of sound, shafts of sunlight piercing through forests, streams. I could see it. Adam was there, fishing with Andrew. But they never made it, did they? I put a stop to that, didn't I? Now Adam was married and had a son. She opened her eyes and reached for the cigarettes. She could remember everything. Every last detail was plain. The doctor struck a match for her and sat on the desk.

"You were in the metro. The boy was playing his violin."

"Yes. I was about equidistant from the guichet and that open violin case. It would have been easy to take out a dollar and put it in with the nickels and dimes. Five dollars. Ten. How many times have I spent dollars and dollars on useless gifts for Sebastian: gold pens, silk scarves? He doesn't need them. I'm sure they're all sitting in a drawer somewhere. He never uses them, but some people expect presents, so you give them. Or they gave you one, so you owe them. Money spent for guilt, not love... and I loved that boy; his music. He was still staring at me. Waiting. So fine, so pure, so sharp. He was cutting me open. Why didn't I stop? I could have stopped and honoured him by listening. He deserved it. I know. And he knew I knew. He probed deeper, hurting me, and still I walked. I found my bus ticket and allowed it to be sucked into the machine while the boy played out his soul there in the metro with crowds sweeping by, stealing their pleasure.

"I could hear him from down on the platform. People lined up, ready for the train. It didn't come. The boy

played. I could still run back and give him his due, stop and listen. Where was the train? The music swelled to fill the length of the station, and the train didn't come. I could still go back, but I didn't.

"I didn't go back." she sobbed. "I didn't go back. I didn't go back. I didn't go back."

7

Chloe absently placed the receiver on its cradle and leaned against the wall of the corridor. The French doors in the living room rattled and the wind blew a fine low whistle through the sills. She lit a cigarette and sat on the narrow stairs, each step worn thin in the centre from generations of feet. Adam was back. Distorted in the thick round concave window, a tree bent to impossible angles, and the bricks of the garden wall dipped and twisted into the ground. A smooth jet of smoke escaped from her clenched teeth. After eighteen months of absence he probably expected to waltz back into her life as though he were continuing a sentence.

Her stockinged foot slid over the rough slate floor of the hall and kitchen. Its warmth surprised her the same way that marble statues did when touched: that the sculptor failed to instill warmth along with the impression of life. Her grey-black inanimate slate had the temperature of flesh. Hot water pipes ran under the floor. What if he turned up on her doorstep with suitcases? Would she show him where to unpack? When she'd moved from his apartment, she'd seen to it that the place was dusted and the plants watered; she'd even continued paying half the rent until he returned from sabbatical, and could make other arrangements. He'd known she wouldn't follow him, but he went anyway. So why, she

thought, as she butted the half-smoked cigarette, did she feel so damned guilty?

Maybe she'd practise the Zimmerman trio sonata. The cassette player was sitting on the bare floor beside the two pianos that were fitted together like a giant jig-saw puzzle in one corner of the large, otherwise empty room: the old rosewood Chickering that she dragged from place to place, and Olga's austere black Baldwin. On her teacher's death, Chloe had discovered that she was the sole beneficiary of the will. The few stocks that had provided a small but comfortable income for Olga, enabled Chloe to buy this little house. It enabled her to work in seclusion, to perfect her technique. For years, Olga had been the only person who believed she would succeed as a performing artist. To have gone to California with Adam would have been a betrayal of that trust.

She pushed the button on the player, and the brutal atonality of the cello and violin accompaniment assaulted her. Not in the mood. She stopped the noise. Was her dislike of contemporary works an asset? There was a detached quality to her playing that suited the music. She idled through the opening passage of a Chopin nocturne and melted into the room. Windows lined the thick walls, east and west, and a huge fireplace dominated the north. Grandmother's carved mantle had finally found a home after years in storage. The elaborate Grinling Gibbons-type floral fantasy added the

only decorative touch to the otherwise stark space. The waxed windowframes and floors were butternut, mellowed by age to a glowing goldeny brown. The real estate lady had been unable to supply the date of construction, but ventured to guess from the twenty inch fieldstone walls and arched foundations, that it was 'old'. Chloe believed that it had been built as a retreat by one of Montreal's religious orders, back in the days when Westmount had been a wilderness.

The ceiling creaked and she looked up at the beams that ran the length of the house. They were butternut too. Was it typical that she had never seen a butternut tree? Since there was no current commercial use of the wood, were there any left? The creaking stopped. Andrew, hers two weekends a month, was at his terminal again. What did one do with a ten-year-old two weekends a month? Especially a ten year old who was obsessed. Against her wishes, Laurence had actually sent him off to computer camp last summer, for his month. For her month, she had dragged him off to museums, horseback riding, apple picking, even baseball games which she detested, in order to draw him into a three dimensional world, but the moment they returned home, he would run upstairs and mush his face against the moniter. She even offered to teach him piano, and to please her, he did try, although it soon became obvious that he was as tone deaf as his father.

Children are one of the few areas in life over which, at the offset, one naively expects absolute control. Chloe sat at the Baldwin, which had the stiffer action, and emersed

herself in the fierce atonal study that was part of a series Adam had been working on in L.A.. The harsh, strident chords ricocheted off the bare walls, the carpetless floors, the unadorned windows, and strafed the still air. A power swelled within her as the force of her hands shook the piano and vibrated the thick wooden planking beneath her. This was real.

"Where are you going?" She stood as Andrew appeared at the foot of the stairs in a half buttoned duffle coat, lugging a knapsack. His grey eyes peeped out from a fringe of ginger hair.

"Julian asked me over. For the night too."

"Were you planning on asking for my permission?"

"Sure. Can I go?"

Any baby softness had vanished sometime when she wasn't paying attention, and what stood before her was a miniature adult. She had a fleeting regret that he didn't want to spend any time with her, and a greater relief that she wasn't going to be called upon to provide entertainment. Nevertheless, she made a token effort.

"Why don't you hang around for a while, and we'll talk?"

"But Adam's coming over."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he called last night when you were out. He said he got me some new software that isn't available up here yet."

"Why didn't you tell me?" She could've used some warning. He shrugged and pulled his cap over his ears.

"I forgot."

"Well, he's not coming until four. Wouldn't you like to do something together?"

"You'd rather be by yourself." He made the statement patiently, without accusation or sadness, his head cocked to one side.

"What makes you think that?"

"Jun says this is your season of solitude."

Jun was the Japanese cook-general who ran the house. She often wondered what he and Andrew discussed when they were alone together.

"I beg your pardon?"

He squinted with concentration.

"Jun says that this is your time of divestment, contemplation and waiting wherein lies a hinge of possibilities."

She tried to figure this out while he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"Mom?"

"Yes, sweetheart."

"Can I go to Julian's now?"

"Yes... yes." Divestment, she supposed; contemplation, certainly; but waiting? For what?

"For the night, too?"

"Do you have your pyjamas and toothbrush?"

He nodded.

"Okay then. See you tomorrow. We'll do something

special."

"We don't have to. I can stay with Julian."

"But I want to. You could try and teach me chess again."

He smiled timidly. God—was she that intimidating? A flood of affection surged through her, and she wanted to embrace this remarkably sweet creature of her making. Where did it spring from, his tenderness, his solicitude? Not from her, and not from Laurence. He would grow up to be one of the good people; like Cosimo, like Adam. She reached out and fastened the remaining buttons, brushing some hair from his eyes. Somewhere along the way, she had forfeited the right to hug this person. She kissed him lightly on the cheek.

"Sure, Mom. Give my love to Adam."

Chloe nodded. He closed the door quietly, and she could hear him scuff on the walk, swish through piles of dead leaves. He waved in the window as he turned the corner of the house. She waved back.

Shit. She slammed the phone down. Now why the Hell, this day of all days, did Sebastian call and demand that she join him for lunch? What news was so important that it couldn't be transmitted by A.T. and T. ? Why was he flying in from New York? Chloe was about to light another cigarette when she noticed that her fingertips were yellow. She picked up the package, walked into the kitchen, and emptied the contents into the trash compacter. She adored Sebastian, but he had dreadful timing. All she could really think about was how to

face Adam. It was his bad timing that had torn the ragged edge in her parting with Adam, a year and a half ago; the ragged edge she had to smooth over now.

Chloe leaned on the kitchen counter and stared out the window looking onto the steep slope. The house cat was sitting in one of the slender saplings, swaying back and forth, its grey coat unruffled by the breeze. She was certain it was staring back. It made her feel like an interloper. 'This is my house,' it would seem to say, 'and only through my magnanimity may you remain'. It let out a long low yowl, then turned its attention elsewhere. Bloody cat, she thought.

It was the very week of Adam's departure for California that her first small break had come. He was still harbouring hopes that she would recognise the futility of her efforts toward a career and follow him, when Sebastian bundled her onto a plane for Augusta, Maine, where she was to substitute for a pianist who had taken ill. Thirty-six hours notice, and a storm to boot. The small turbo-prop was jolted about in the turbulence, and she had only vague snippets of recollection. Sebastian's white knuckles on the armrest, the flickering lights, circling for an hour to lighten on fuel in case of a crash landing. The concert, she forgot entirely: maybe because it was succeeded by so many other concerts, in so many other little towns, with so many other second-rate symphonies. She wondered sometimes if she'd ever have the opportunity of performing with a first-rate orchestra. To date, she hadn't even performed in Montréal.

The cat flashed from the tree in pursuit of a squirrel.

What if she had never met Sebastian? What then? Would she have married Adam and gone to California? What if she had never agreed to let him 'groom her'. She had all the basics, he had said, they only needed developing and packaging. And packaging, yes, he had said as he assessed the possibilities, twisting the sapphire ring on his pinkie, letting his little Turkish cigarette dangle out the side of his mouth as he walked around and around her deciding what gimmick would work with her. Sebastian was a great believer in gimmicks. He dragged her away to New York, rented a studio and hired a teacher to drill her in a post-modern repertoire. Adam had protested. She could study in Montreal. Olga could teach her. But no. Olga was too sick. Too sick. While in New York, Sebastian had started buying her clothes. Red clothes. "Watch out," Cosimo had warned at dinner one night "Watch your step with this man. He wants to control you." "Nonsense," she had replied, but the following day, Sebastian had pinned her against the wall of her studio, and stared at her face for five minutes. Nothing else, just stared. Then he had ordered out for Chinese food.

He planned to base her reputation on the interpretation of contemporary works of living and not quite cold composers. All the pianists who chose to specialize in that area, he claimed, were thin young men. It was his bright idea that at least, if the audience didn't want to listen to the music, they could look at the musician. Chloe in red. It made a nice contrast to the orchestra. Then one of the thin young men took ill in Augusta, and Adam flew to California without a proper

farewell.

She turned on the trash compacter and took pleasure in imagining the unsmokable mangle of tobacco, orange peels and milk cartons. In the mechanical hum, she heard the cello section of the Zimmerman work. She closed her eyes and lay both palms flat on the surface of the machine. What did Sebastian want now?

When he pressed her against the wall, of that little studio, with the snow falling, with his dark eyes...

There were mirrors, floor to ceiling, and barres. It should have been selections from 'Swan Lake' or 'Sleeping Beauty'. Dance music. 'Copelia', 'Giselle.' She longed to play something melodious. Ten hours a day of contemporary. Michael would leave for coffee with instructions that she focus on a particular section. A thin young man with prominent Adam's apple. She would furtively play 'The Waltz of the Flowers' glancing at her guilty reflection in the mirrored wall, phantom ballerinas everywhere.

He was greying at the temples. He wasn't touching her. His hands were on the mirror, inches from her head, his smell a mixture of tobacco, soap, and snow. Flakes hit the window, sounding like distant chimes. She wanted to touch his hair.

It surprised her when she began to appreciate the pieces

Sebastian made her play. It was ironic that he was managing Adam as well: encouraging his composition. Neither he nor Chloe mentioned Sebastian in their letters, but each was aware of his presence in the other's life.

She shut off the machine, immediately regretting the fact that she had nothing to smoke. She'd have Jun pick some up when he did the marketing. He was kneeling over the goldfish pond in the small Victorian greenhouse abutting the kitchen, and looked up briefly to acknowledge her presence in his part of the house. Spiky yellow water lilies drifted as aimlessly on the surface as the multi-coloured carp below. His soft black crêpe-de-chine cassock floated around him as he dropped frozen brine shrimp to the fish. Chloe preferred the creamy white robes that comprised his summer wardrobe. At other times, he wore bright red, and although she wasn't quite sure what occasioned the chance to a festive colour, she suspected religious observance. He spoke better French than the natives, and admitted to studies in Paris, but his reticence precluded elaboration. She pictured him as a failed priest reverting to Buddhist origins. There was an air of piety about him, even when he took off in the Volkswagon wearing jeans. She left the workings of the house entirely to him, and he consulted her only when he wished to undertake a project likely to encroach on her sensibilities, such as the construction of the goldfish pond in the greenhouse. Chloe didn't see any reason why he shouldn't, so he proceeded in his placid way to pickax a hole in the tile flooring,

through a layer of sand and gravel, into the earth beneath, installing filter, pump, and pouring cement, and laying the black ceramic tiles that lined the sides and bottom of the pool. When completed, it was rectangular, two feet deep, five feet long, three and a half feet wide. He stocked it with the strange goggle-eyed breed Chloe found repulsive, and sat for hours in the lotus position staring into the water. Cosimo joined him in this ritual whenever he came to visit, the two of them, palms upward on their laps, staring. Looking at fish was reputed to be good for the blood pressure. She could see how this might help Cosimo, but she didn't think Jun had any blood pressure.

After the pond digging, he had ordered an orange tree from a nursery in Formosa, that flourished in one corner. It was small, but already bore fruit. She felt sorry for the little branches that sagged under the weight of the oranges. When Chloe first saw the house, she thought the greenhouse would be handy for growing winter tomatoes, but Jun filled the troughs with bright oriental poppies, crocus, hibiscus, and lavender. In one dark corner of the basement, he cultivated mushrooms in flats of decomposed horse manure, and under artificial light in the central vault, an entire spice garden. He saw to it that the little wine cellar was meticulously stocked, with labels that never saw a Q.L.B. shelf. He never explained, and Chloe never asked, but simply paid the reasonable accounts presented her, and revelled in her liberation from daily banalities. The lavender was dried

and sewn into sachets to keep the moths at bay, saffron was harvested from the crocus, hibiscus blossom made an excellent and soothing tea, and though she had wondered about the poppies, they were picked in flower and arranged in large blown-glass vases on the pianos. She had to admit that the flash of crimson was just what the room, devoid of colour, needed.

He finished feeding the fish and wafted over to the freezer to replace the package of shrimp.

"Jun?"

He stood quietly as she spoke.

"There will be a guest for dinner. Could you do lobster Cantonese?" She realised as she spoke, that an unconscious emphasis had been placed on the word 'guest', as though she was reassuring herself that the intrusion was temporary. Jun frowned. Had she upset some plans?

"Is that a problem?"

"No. no. I'll go to the market later this morning."

"Too bad you didn't stock the pool with lobsters. It'd save you a trip."

He ignored her comment and ducked his head into the cupboard beside the fridge, emerging a moment later with a container of varsol. God. He was going to do the floors again. He cherished the fourteen inch boards more than she did, if that was possible. They'd been the main reason she'd bought the house. Where were the butternut trees? What did butternuts taste like? Butter? The smell of varsol gave her a

headache. She grabbed a heavy wool cape from the hall closet and passed into the living room. When she opened the door leading into the walled garden, stray leaves were propelled across the floor by the November wind. A vine, still in flame, lingered on the leeward side of the bricks and she gazed up at the tapering form of the gingo tree as she settled on the wooden deck chair. She had discovered it in the cellar, leaning in the shadows on the far side of an archway, and fancied it had been picked up for a song when the Mauritania's fittings were auctioned off. Jun had sanded and revarnished, and the fine teak grain was clearly defined by the high finish. She stroked the armrest and smiled. A fast breeze whipped over the wall and she tightened the cloak, tucking her thick black hair into the hood. The only sounds were the swish of the yellow fan leaves over the granite flagstones, and a whistling in the eaves. Resting on deck, somewhere in mid-Atlantic, and soon a porter would come with tea. She could hear him singing old Broadway tunes as he caressed the floor with rags. Birds might come if she hung suet from the branches. She'd ask Jun to pick some up...

Room service delivered lunch to Sebastian's bedside. Chloe stretched out on the pillows and noticed that the hairs on his muscular back were unexpectedly golden in the sunlight.

"So what was so urgent that you had to rush up from New York?"

He handed her the glass of sparkling wine and joined her

under the covers. The first time she had tumbled into bed with him, she had been utterly satisfied, and surprised, as she had been raised to believe that sex was inextricably tangled up with love. It was a revelation that 'like' served equally well.

"So why are you here?"

"Have you ever seen a pink sailboat?"

"Don't change the subject."

"Who? ME? Never. The second Mrs. Ridley-Chase has one."

He took a strategic pause and ran his finger around the rim of the wine glass. It rang in G sharp.

"Okay. I'll bite. Who is the second Mrs. Ridley-Chase?"

"The little cutie who snatched up the only Mr. Ridley-Chase before the first Mrs. Ridley-Chase had time to rally her defenses."

"And pink sailboats?"

"Sailboat. Singular. I assure you, once you've seen one... hull, deck, sails, all pink. Peculiarly disgusting."

"Oh, get on with it." She reached over to the cooler and poured more wine.

"Have you heard of the International Wildlife Fund? Of course you have. Well, there's going to be a benefit concert, telecast on P.B.S. Great Performances, live from Lincoln Centre, or whatever... and this sweet misguided overindulged youngster happens to be on one of the committees. Well, we were out the other day on the aforementioned craft of the hideous hue, when she let it drop that Yuri Petrov, in one

of his renowned fits of pique, cancelled out."

"So?"

"This concert is to be a sort of mini-history of piano composition, and there is a conspicuous dangling end where there should be a bang of post-modernism. Well, I convinced her..."

"I can guess how."

"... that I just happened to have in my stable of performers, a terrifically talented artiste, and even though it was ridiculously short notice..."

"When is this concert?"

"Wednesday night. That even though it was ridiculously short notice, she would be able to fill in."

"Sebastian! Do you intend to make me by having me fill in on ridiculously short notice at every concert where a pianist cancels out?"

"I go to a great deal of time and trouble to infect these people with costly and debilitating germs:..."

"And Petrov?"

"Him I had to bribe. Anyway, the entertainment committee approved the selection this morning."

Chloe clutched the bedclothes and listened to her insides rumble.

"Do you think I'm ready?"

"Of course you are, or I wouldn't have committed you. Besides, in the whole viewing audience, I think only three people might possibly notice if you hit a wrong note. Two

if the composer is dead."

"What should I play?"

"Who cares? The following for Zimmerman and his ilk is so select, that when you start playing, people all over America are going to zap to 'Hill Street Blues'. The stuff's unlisten-
-able. With luck, some will only turn off the sound and stare."

"Adam! God. What time is it?"

"Two thirty... relax... we have plenty of time." He took her glass, put it beside the telephone, and kissed her neck, her hair, her mouth...

Chloe was watching lobsters crawl across the kitchen floor when the bell rang. It was a real bell; solid brass suspended from an arm of iron, and it had been tugged languidly, as though the caller had been seduced by the country atmosphere of her cul-de-sac. A caller... Adam. She opened the door expectantly only to find Sebastian's familiar back. He stared at the naked maple saplings that clung to the cliff, their thin branches moving almost imperceptibly in the dying breeze. He glanced up as he turned to face her.

"Goya sky."

"El Greco. View, of Toledo."

"Smart ass."

"Well, isn't it?"

"Yes, dear. But it doesn't make you any easier to live with." He pecked her cheek en passant, and tossed his broad

brimmed fedora onto the Baldwin. She slammed the door.

"You don't live with me."

"Allah be praised. Mother didn't raise me to live in a cloister. Why don't you let me buy you some furniture?"

"If I wanted furniture, I'd have furniture. Now what the Hell are you doing here? I thought you'd be on the plane by now."

"Where's the perfect wife? Tarring the roof? Repairing the foundations? Whipping himself up a new dress?" He sat at the Chickering. Chloe's muscles tensed as he flipped through the music.

"He's in the kitchen."

"Where did you ever find him, anyway?"

"He came with the house. Now why don't you take your hat and leave?" She handed him the fedora. He threw it across the floor.

"How do you know you aren't harbouring a wanted criminal?"

"That's fine with me. Please go."

"I want to hear Adam's concerto."

"I don't want you here when Adam comes."

"I am going to hear the new concerto." He turned a page and picked out the theme with his right hand. Chloe inhaled sharply.

"Oh Sebastian... please."

"I'll leave after I hear the concerto." He continued playing and she wanted to smack him as he so casually abused the melody she had been sweating over.

"You promise you'll leave, then?"

"Yes."

"On your word of honour?"

"Jesus! Don't you trust me yet?"

"No."

A grey cat leapt from the garden wall to the French doors, whining and rubbing against the panes. The twilight was deep blue as Sebastian opened the door. The animal brushed past him and circled Chloe's legs, arching its back and purring loudly. She picked it up and shoved it through the cellar door.

"Bloody cat. How is it that they manage to pinpoint the very people who can't stand them, then proceed to attach themselves. Insinuating beasts."

Sebastian watched with interest as she wiped her hands on her jeans.

"If you don't like it, get rid of it."

"I can't. It belongs to the house. Besides, we have mice."

"Aren't you going to change out of your jeans?"

"Why? The house has weird old foundations."

"So you have to wear jeans?"

"NO. So I need the cat. Otherwise there'd be mice nad rats and squirrels running over your feet. What time is it?"

"Five. Are you two getting back together?"

She threw her hands in the air, peered through the window into the gathering darkness, then pressed her palm on

a switch that flooded the garden with light.

"Well, you're pretty nervous about seeing someone you won't change your jeans for."

"Oh shut up about the jeans. Just shush."

Chloe slapped the spotlight off and went into the kitchen. Jun was meditating in the greenhouse by the light of a single candle. A faint shimmering passed in the pond. Tidy mounds of chopped food lined the dark counter, and there was a rich scent of baking. In a large tub filled with white wine, the lobsters were clicking. They would pass out before being thrown in boiling water. Tender flesh. She tip-toed out. Obviously, everything was under control. She heard Adam's knock and waited in the shadows of the corridor as Sebastian let him in. After eavesdropping on the exchanged greetings, she crept up to her room and lay on the bed for awhile, making orange circles in the blackness with the tip of her cigarette. She hadn't reckoned that after eighteen months she would still feel confusion about leaving Adam.

When she joined them twenty minutes later, Jun had lit the fire and set up the small trestle table. The two men sat on folding chairs, drinking and talking. Relaxed. Sebastian smiled approvingly at the sleek black jersey dress that hugged the contours of her body, while Adam, tanned, slimmer from exercise, and perhaps a little greyer, stood to embrace her. Candles were burning on the pianos, mantle and table. Conscious of Sebastian, he kissed her lightly on the

lips and handed her a glass of wine.

"Pale, beautiful Chloe. You're a sight after all those blonde cows. 'Age cannot whither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety.' "

"Thank you, Adam, for recognition of my advanced age and lack of bovinity. Sorry I kept you gentlemen waiting."

Sebastian smiled sweetly.

"Waiting? Adam, were we waiting?" He winked.

"I was checking on things in the kitchen. Is that the concerto?" She indicated a fat envelope sitting on the Baldwin beside Sebastian's hat.

"Yes. Sebastian wants to hear it. Do we have time to give it a run through before dinner?"

Chloe saw that the table was set for three and shot Sebastian a killing look. He grinned and shrugged.

"I suppose so."

"Here's the piano part." He delved into the package and handed her a thick pile, tied with string. She was comfortable in the scenario. There was the familiarity of the hands she'd known for fifteen years, fumbling with the knot in the cord. She wanted to touch his hands.

"I haven't quite polished the orchestral transcription, but that should only take a couple of weeks. After that, it shouldn't take too long to get copies printed up... again, another week or two, maybe longer since it'll be nearing Christmas. It's scored for forty instruments. I hope that's enough time... provided of course, you like it."

As they spread papers over their respective pianos, she suddenly realised he wasn't addressing her. She beckoned to Sebastian with a tilt of her head.

"I need you to turn pages."

It was strange seeing Adam's curly head at the other piano. Sebastian stood attentively by as they limped through the first movement. By the second, she was swept into the flow of the simple repetitive theme, more melodic than his usual compositions. It was a startling change from the style of the studies; derivative of people like Tâkemitsu, but this had a unique quality with no identifiable influence. The only thing it came close to was the later work of Scriabin. There was an impressionistic flavour that would make it accessible to the concert-going public. With the completion of the allegro section, she admitted that Adam had finally developed into a first-rate composer. The final chords still hung in the air as she threw her arms around his neck. Over his shoulder she saw the dedication at the head of his copy: For Chloe and her body molded itself to his as he returned the hug. For an instant she surrendered to the firm pressure of his hands on the small of her back, then she pushed him away.

"I'll see about the dinner."

"I'll help." He offered casually.

"You needn't bother. I'm quite capable." Seeing Adam's puzzled expression, she immediately regretted the sharpness in her response. Sebastian watched with a bemused smile as he drank the diluted remains of his scotch. She wanted to boot

him out the door. Adam followed her into the corridor and pressed her against the wall.

"What's going on? Is it Sebastian?" His tan accentuated the fan of creases radiating from the corners of his eyes, and she was momentarily weakened by the scent of Gauloises on his clothes. It would be so easy to get into all that again. He suited her so.

"Sebastian is my manager. He manages my career, like he manages yours. I manage my life."

"What is your life? Why didn't you come with me?"

"Why did you leave?"

"I needed a change."

"From me."

"I wanted you to come. I begged you. You never visited. Your letters were... impersonal."

"Maybe I needed a change too." She edged over and sat on the stairs. He remained standing.

"Are you punishing me for going?"

"No. When you told me you were leaving, I knew I had to make a choice. I had never, in my entire life, been alone. It was a chance to get a perspective on things. Us, me, my work."

"That's pretty calculating." His face was filled with anger and longing. "I thought we'd already figured us out."

"So did I. At least I deluded myself into believing we did."

"I went to your concert at Berkley." He turned away from her and slapped his hand on the Bellini column she had salvaged.

from Cosimo's wrecking spree along with the fireplace. It had also been in storage through her marriage and her time with Adam. She hadn't told him she was going to California. How to brazen this one out? She studied his feet. Leather jogging shoes.

"I just happened to see a copy of the Berkely student newspaper, and there you were on the back cover. I drove up that day, to see you."

"Why didn't you come backstage? It would have been lovely to see a familiar face."

"Don't pull that shit on me. I'm not your cousin."

"I didn't mean..."

"I know exactly what you mean. You have a very neat little talent for writing people out of your life when the relationship becomes inconvenient."

His feet were disappearing in a black haze.

"No, Adam... you're still part of my life."

"Why didn't you call? We could have arranged to meet."

"I don't know... It didn't occur to me..."

"When people are in love, they remember. They make time." He dug his fingers into her shoulders.

"You're hurting me." She began to cry. He let go and pounded the wall with his fist.

"Do you love me? Did you ever love me?"

She hugged her knees and didn't answer. She wanted to bury her face in his shabby old tweed jacket, but didn't. One of the few domestic efforts of her life had been to sew

leather patches on the worn elbows. He sat next to her on the step and lit two cigarettes. She took one. There was silence for several minutes, before he finally spoke.

"I resigned from McGill. I'm taking a job at the music faculty at U.C.L.A. beginning in January."

"I wondered why you didn't come back in August."

"I'm going back as soon as I sublet the flat and ship my stuff."

There was another long silence and they could hear Sebastian poking the fire; adding another log. Why was he leaving, again?

"Aren't you going to say anything?" he asked.

"I... suppose you have... someone there?"

"What?"

"You know... a woman..." She needed a drink.

"No, Chloe. I don't. Shit! You know, I think you'd be relieved if I did. Off the hook. Bye-bye, Adam. What's happened to you?"

"Nothing. I do love you."

"Then come with me."

She stood up and tried to look out the little round window, but all was darkness.

"I can't."

"You can if you want to. You can pursue your career from anywhere. All you have here is an empty house. For God's sake, we have so much..."

"It's not empty." She shouted. Oh, no. Sebastian could

hear everything. She pushed him into the kitchen where Jun was arranging the lobster Cantonese on a bed of rice. He ignored their entrance and carried the platter into the living room. Adam shook off her arm.

"Two pianos and a dishwasher?"

Chloe went to the other side of the goldfish pond while Adam stood in the archway.

"There's Andrew."

"Come off it. Laurence'd let you have him three months a year if you wanted him, which you don't."

Ouch.

"Well, maybe I don't want you either. I just don't know. I definitely don't want California... or New York."

He winced.

"That's right. Sebastian's been bugging me to locate there for nearly a year."

"Why haven't you?"

"I like stagnating cities. Perhaps when I tire of Montreal, I'll move to Berlin!"

"That's right. Be flippant," he screamed. "Why can't you admit, once in your life, that you belong somewhere, with someone; with me? You can't keep turning people away. Chloe... look at me."

"Adam, how can I make you understand. This is my home. Not my parent's, not Laurence's, not Cosimo's, not your's. The deed is in my name. I pay the taxes. When the roof leaks, I call the contractors. The place is empty because it isn't

cluttered up with someone else's leavings. I'll get bloody chairs when I'm good and ready, and when I do, they'll be more than just places to sit!"

"Jesus, calm down."

"Give me another cigarette."

He lit her one and walked over to the pots of hibiscus, leaning on the shelving beside her. She inhaled and tried to think logically. He was standing so close she could feel his warmth through two layers of clothing. She did belong, but she didn't want to.

"Adam," she spoke softly. "I'm thirty-five years old and am just now learning who I am. I think. I don't want to be encased in anyone else's life."

"Encased? Was sharing a life with me so stultifying? We came so close... the house..."

"The house was lovely. Maybe we could have made a life there... I don't know..."

Adam turned suddenly, upsetting a pot of flowers. A clot of dirt fell into the pond, disturbing the fish:

"You squashed that. We were so close."

"I'm sorry. All this is hurting you. I never wanted to hurt you. If it hadn't been for you, I'd probably still be living a cushy deadening life with Laurence."

"So glad to oblige." He lashed.

"Listen... I know a couple who have been together for twenty years now, and one day he told me that he was happy she had 'her little passion.' I mean, this woman is a respected

art historian who does consulting work for the National Gallery, and this jerk is pleased that she is more contented that if she was merely messing around the house, although I got the distinct impression he would have been happier if she preferred doing just that. Such a benign, patronising attitude. Men think they're being so magnanimous, 'allowing' their women to work. Even when I was living with you, it was your work that was serious. As far as you were concerned, my involvement with the piano was a quasi-diversion. I was 'your lady'. Adam and Chloe. Laurence and Chloe. Siamese twins. No matter how unstructured the relationship, obligations develop... expectations. How did you imagine my life would be in our romantic hideaway in the country? You'd look to me for entertainment. I was always 'on'. Have you any idea how taxing that was? I could just see you, schleping down groups of students for weekend seminars. 'Come down to my place. Here's a map. Bring skis. We have plenty of room. No, no, Chloe won't mind. She just loves an audience.' I could see it. I could see it. It was almost easier living with Laurence. He only expected me to be decorative."

Adam listened intently. She ground her butt in a pot.

"It's the same when I perform... well, you saw the schtick... the red dress, the split programme. 'The stunning Chloe Delaney breezes through works, classic and contemporary with style and panache. This critic predicts a brilliant future for the lady.' " She recited. "They see me on stage, and want me to behave in a certain way, even offstage, and

despite all my efforts at detachment, I wind up acting out parts, playing whatever Chloe they're fantasizing. I get so wired, I don't know what's true anymore. That's why I need this... sanctuary."

"You claim to love me. I'm sorry, but I just don't understand."

"You aren't listening. This has nothing to do with love. As you so delicately pointed out, I won't even live with my son. Do you think I don't love him?" She laughed sharply.

"I guess you believe I don't. Well, you're wrong. Maybe someday I'll be prepared to live with someone again, but right now, I can't." Chloe took the cigarette he had just lit and stared at their two pairs of feet. How long did it take familiarity to die?

"Can't or won't?" Adam picked up the spilt pot and replaced it on the shelf.

"All right. Can't. Can't move to California. You asked a minute ago when I'd admit I belonged somewhere. Well I belong here. In Montreal. This is home."

"Home is with someone. Not a place. I'm going to New York tomorrow so I won't get a chance to see Andy. I have a package for him."

"I'll see that he gets it." New York. He'd be seeing Cosimo, and Cosimo wouldn't understand either. He'd been pro-Adam from the start. They both stood, frozen, staring at the fish.

"Is that it then? All over. No more," he asked quietly.

"Adam... I do love you. I do. I just don't want to live

with you." The blackness outside the greenhouse was absolute. No stars, no light from neighbouring houses. Only the cliff-face. They might have been in space. Why weren't there stars? Why didn't it snow? She wanted everything stiff, and frozen and suspended. Clods of dirt still lay beside Adam's shoe. She added: "Can we still be friends?"

The explosiveness of his reaction stunned her. He swung his arm at the shelf and knocked over three pots, then glared at her for about thirty seconds before speaking.

"For Christ's sake. You are weaving an elaborate delusion for yourself, aren't you, Miss independence... Miss great solo artiste... Can't you see who the fuck is pulling the strings Miss Chloe Delaney marionette extraordinaire? Ha! Yes. My God. She thinks she is... look at her. Clever way of avoiding commitment. So you think you're in love with Sebastian? Ho ho. He has a wife... he has children... he's using you. I had him pegged from the word go."

"I'm not in love with Sebastian. I'm using him as much as he's using me... more."

"Sure you are. What are you getting in exchange for his favours? Eh? Piddling little concerts at college campuses and guest appearances with the Little Rock Symphonia. Whoopie. What a pathetic little life. And this... sanctuary... is that what you called it? Sanctuary. Paid for with Olga's sweat."

"She was for it. She supported me."

"Ya.. supported you all right. This house is a testament to her faith in you, and what do you do? You spend your life playing

works you hate. Big success." He was yelling. Never in all the years they had known each other had he ever yelled at her.

"I'm doing what I want to be doing. I'm performing. You would have buried me. Buried me."

"I would not have. I love you. I'm the only one who does love you."

"Cosimo..."

"Oh don't dredge up your neurotic dependancy on Cosimo. I like Cosimo... I think he's great... but you... Lord.... Cosimo this... Cosimo that... you'd think the man was up for canonization. I love you. I've loved you for Goddamned fifteen years. I can overlook the fact that you double-timed me with Laurence... I can overlook the fact that you're screwing Sebastian. I know there aren't any more, because you don't put out unless you're offered something. Did you ever once think how I felt when you—?Oh yes... we had just made love... that was it wasn't it—?We were still fitted against each other... and you announced that you had become engaged to Laurence. Nice. Nice girl. I could never quite figure you out, but Jesus, Jesus, I loved you. I still love you. God, Chloe, you are a bitch."

It was all worked through. The last line came out with flat calm. His arms hung limply at his side. Tears were streaming down her face. She wished they weren't. She wished she didn't feel anything. She turned away, heaving. Just like when she was a child, she could still stand a distance and watch the proceedings as through an editing machine: cut this—reshoot that—zoom in for a long shot of tear tricking down a face. What was wrong

with her. There wasn't a reason on earth she couldn't go with Adam; Sebastian could direct her from California. He didn't give a shit. What was holding her back? She was still young enough to have his babies. She could redeem herself. Why not? Why bloody not?

"You don't get it, do you? I'm not going to be your eunuch." He abruptly left the room. She supported herself against a shelf of flats. The front door slammed. A peal shuddered from the brass bell. Her hand shook. Divestment...

Sebastian sat in solitary splendour behind a pot of hyacinth. When Chloe stepped into the candlelight he offered to serve her dinner.

"I'm not in the least bit hungry. Pour me some wine, would you? Oh, never mind. I'll do it myself." She returned to the short corridor for a cognac. Sebastian continued eating as she sat opposite and demonstrated surprising restraint. He said nothing.

"Sebastian?"

He looked up, still chewing.

"Do you like November?"

He patted his mouth with the napkin, then folded his hands on the edge of the table. "Not really. I like to ski. There's rarely any snow in November."

"No. I mean the feel of November: the melancholy."

"No. I can't recall any mood exclusive to the month, inherent as it were. Is this a trick question?"

"But don't you find it an odd time... like a fifth

season, hovering in a static nether region; neither autumn nor winter... it's subtlety, austerity... fields muted with frost... trees drenched black against undecided skies..."

"Like I said, I prefer the snow. You know, one of the chief traits I've always admired in you, was your utter lack of sentimentality. I can't tell you how your little speech depresses me. Shall we change the subject?"

She handed Sebastian the empty snifter which he dutifully rose to refill, talking all the while.

"I thought the concerto was excellent. A real advance for Adam."

"Don't count on him letting me perform it. I think I'm in his black book."

"Rubbish. A temporary sting. Even on the outside chance that he genuinely detests you, which I doubt, he's not going to stop his work being played to an audience of New York critics simply to spite you."

"Oh yeah?"

"He is, in his way, as ambitious as you."

Chloe digested that idea while Sebastian stoked the fire.

"Where's Jun?" she asked.

"In the basement, clearing out mouse carcasses, I think."

"Do you think I'm awful?"

"Not at all."

"Do you think it's going to snow?"

"No." He stood behind her and massaged her neck.

"Do you think... oh Hell. If you don't want to witness

a maudlin number, you'd better go."

"Play me something." His fingers were now stroking her temples. The action had a soothing, hypnotic effect.

"Not now, Sebastian."

"Mozart... no... Scarlatti."

"I'm not in the mood."

"Sonata in G Major. You used to play that a lot." His voice was a rhythmic monotone. As usual, she felt her resolve weakening.

"That was before you started cramming post-modern crap down my throat."

"That's work." He chanted. " Play the Scarlatti. For me. Go on..."

Chloe put down the brandy and pushed the chair out. He sat and stretched his legs out.

"The Chickering. I prefer its tone for classical."

She brushed her fingers over the fine grain of the polished rosewood. She loved this piano. Grandmother's piano. Sebastian nodded and smiled.

"It's a fluke. The sounding board is wafer-thin, and the action... you only have to think the notes. My tuner's been trying to buy it from me for years." She flexed her fingers. Could she remember the Scarlatti? Of course she could. The stool shrieked against the floor as she drew it back, smoothing her dress beneath her. The fire and candlelight flung shadows the length of the room, pooling warmth on the shining floor, on Sebastian's glossy hair. She concentrated for a few minutes,

thinking the piece through in her head: the beat, the pace.

"Do you need the music? Shall I turn pages?"

She barely heard him. This wasn't to wound Laurence, or impress Adam, or amuse Sebastian. She began to play.

There was only Chloe, and the music.

She was smiling.

"The only preservation from oblivion is the impression you leave on life: your effect on those who touch you," Chloe mumbled. Dr. Homsy handed her the box of kleenex that occupied a conspicuous place on his desk, for which up to now, she had had no need. She tore a tissue out and blew her nose. Then she stood, paced, and tried to collect her thoughts.

"How many mistakes is a person allowed to make?"

"Morally, ethically, legally?" The doctor raised his hand to the side of his face that was twitching. "Are you religious?"

"No. Never mind."

"What happened on the metro?"

"I got on the train. Not a moment's hesitation. I just stepped right in. The seat was still warm. But then, everything was. The metal poles, the doors... I stared at the floor, at the ugly, dirty tiles. The door slid shut, and I could still hear the damned violin. The train moved. The music grew louder in my head. I could get out at any stop and go back: Peel, Guy, Atwater... I couldn't move. I had no... will. That's the last thing I can remember, that all the will had been drained out of me. I am told that an inspector found me at the turn-about, past Angrignon."

"Why do you think you had this episode? Why did the boy trigger that reaction?" The button on his phone was

flashing. Calls weren't coming through. Had he anticipated a long session, Chloe thought? The doctor poured two glasses of water from a thermos and gave her one.

"It wasn't the boy, precisely. It was more what he was playing. The Vivaldi. I had a friend who played that 'piece.'"

"Why would that necessarily upset you?"

"He died. He was a juvenile diabetic. When he was only twenty, he landed a job with the Chicago symphony. He went blind when he was twenty-six and had to quit. His kidneys began to fail, and there wasn't much hope of a transplant. He had AB negative blood. I visited him the week before he died. He played that piece. His fingers were swollen. He had trouble.... "

"And you think that's the reason?"

"I don't know. It was hot. The little girl in the white dress was so much like me the first time I met Granny."

"And she died."

"Yes."

"Were you thinking of her too?"

"I don't know. Not consciously, perhaps, but she was there... and Olga?"

"Olga?"

"She was my teacher, and friend. I haven't been close to many women... only Granny and Olga. I can't think of anyone else. Olga loved me. She made me stretch. As Hector said, I was living off the capital of my gift, and wasn't

developing it."

"What happened to her?"

"She was older; seventy when she took me on." Chloe had rolled the tissue into a ball and was shredding off tiny bits that littered the floor around her feet. The doctor was silent. She couldn't even hear the scratch of his pen.

"Olga was living in Paris during the great influenza epidemic of 1918. She was living in a basement. There was no one to look after her. She worked as an exotic dancer at night to finance her day studies at the Conservatoire. No one knew she was sick, so they couldn't help. Did you know that all the cases, or practically all the cases of Parkinson's disease can be traced back to that epidemic? They haven't made an indisputable connection, but people who have it seem to have had influenza at that time. She was dying when I knew her. It was killing her. She couldn't even play anymore. There was no control in her hands. She played through my playing. She willed me to be good. There was no choice. It was what I had to do."

"Did you resent that?"

"No. I wanted to be good. It was right."

"But she died. Did you resent that?"

"How could I resent that? People die."

"You'd be amazed how many people resent their loved ones for dying."

"Well I don't. I want to go now. Andrew'll be waiting."

"What about Cosimo?"

Snap. The doctor stood and faced out the window, his hands resting on the sill. She froze on the chair.

"Do you resent Cosimo for dying?" he repeated.

"No."

"You haven't mentioned him once, in any of our sessions."

"So?"

"Isn't that strange?"

"Why?"

"He just died three months ago."

She shrugged. "So I haven't talked about it. Maybe it's too fresh."

"You've taken a defensive attitude."

"You're not supposed to tell me that. You're just supposed to note it in your file."

"You're changing the subject."

"The subject isn't one I care to discuss."

"You can talk about your Grandmother, and your teacher, and your friend, who all died years ago, and yet you can't bring yourself to mention your cousin, who died a few months ago?"

"I don't resent Cosimo for dying. How can I state it so you'll comprehend?"

"But Chloe... you haven't mentioned him at all. If your friend Sebastian hadn't filled me in a bit, I wouldn't have been aware of your cousin's existence."

"Would it have made a difference to our little chats?"

"Only in so far as he was an important part of your life."

"Would you say that he influenced you or that..."

"Leading the witness."

The doctor turned and raised his hands in mock protest.

"No, no. I think that perhaps it's time we discussed your relationship with Cosimo, a little. Just a little. I'd like to understand the rôle he played in your life."

"He was family. My only family. He was also my best friend. There."

"Is that all you're going to say?"

"There's no more to say."

"Cosimo is dead."

"I know that."

"But you won't talk about it."

"He died. What's to talk about? What would you have me say? I don't know what you want me to say?" Chloe stood and held the back of the chair, staring hard at the doctor.

"I don't know either, but I'm sure there's something to be said."

"Round and round and round we go, and where we'll stop... can't we stop now?" She pounded the chair-back. "I don't want to talk anymore. I'm hot and I'm tired, and I'm frustrated."

"And you're angry."

"I will be in a minute."

"You're angry at Cosimo."

"I'm not angry at Cosimo. I love Cosimo. How many times do I have to say it?" she shouted.

"But Chloe... you have steadfastly refused to discuss this man, whom you claim was your only family and your best friend. I can't help but wonder why."

"Well, wonder away. My cousin is my business."

"Your cousin?"

"Yes, my cousin."

"Cosimo?"

"Well, who else were we talking about?" Why didn't he let up? He had stopped scribbling and was slapping the notebook against his thigh. She had a throbbing headache.

"Wasn't he, in fact, your brother?" He looked her directly in the eye.

"Who told you that?" she snapped. "Sebastian?"

He nodded. She pushed the chair aside and paced to the far wall. Damn him.

"He had no right to tell you that."

"What's the problem, Chloe? Cosimo was your brother."

"I didn't find out for thirty-eight years."

"I can understand what a shock it must have been."

"No you can't."

"I was concerned that you hadn't mentioned him. I thought that perhaps you were blocking him out."

"I could never block Cosimo out."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"About what? Cosimo, my cousin/brother/friend is dead."

"And you're very angry. Why? Because he didn't tell you earlier?"

"He wanted to tell me all along."

"Yet he didn't."

Chloe stood beside the desk and wrapped her fingers around the glass paperweight. She gripped it tightly and felt all the tension in her body travel into her hand... into the glass. Her confusion swirled with the opaque clouds, the iridescent seas.

"I wouldn't let him tell me."

"I don't understand."

She transferred the paperweight to the other hand. It was already body temperature. The doctor was right. She was blocking, but not what he thought. She had to sort it out step by step.

"I was adopted. When you're adopted, you always wonder about your 'real' parents, and especially if you're unhappy with your adoptive ones."

He had opened the pad and was scribbling again. "Yes..."

"When I first met Granny and Cosimo... perhaps even then, I instinctively knew there was a blood connexion, I don't know. That meant that my adoptive father was also blood, but that didn't seem important."

"Why didn't you ask then?"

"I don't know... It didn't make any sense to me then. How could I have been? There were only the three of them: my father, and since he adopted me, he couldn't have been my real father... And there was Granny, but she was seventy-five when I met her, and I was ten. Then there was Cosimo. He

was twenty years older than me. But he was gay. How could I have been a Delaney? When I was older, Cosimo started dropping these hints."

"What hints?"

"Oh... he was constantly comparing me to Granny... physically...temperamentally... as if he was inviting me to ask. But I couldn't bring myself to do it."

"Do you know why?"

"I suppose I deluded myself into believing that he was going to deny any knowledge of my paternity."

"Why 'deluded'?" he asked.

"Because..." She paused and squeezed the glass sphere so hard that the veins on her hand bulged. "...because I don't think I wanted to know ...we shared the same blood."

"Ah-huh. So you found the notion of being a real Delaney repugnant?"

"No. No." She sat in the chair and turned away from the doctor. "You don't understand."

"Then explain it to me."

"He was never forced to tell me."

"Forced?"

"He was gay." Chloe had trouble continuing.

"I'm sorry. I don't follow."

"If he had been straight, he would have to have told me."

"What difference would that have made?"

"I... I... I loved him," she whispered. "And not like a cousin... and not... not like a brother. I didn't want to know— I didn't!"

8

"Basil."

"Chloe. Come in." Basil's sleek black hair was brushed and parted like a schoolboy's. Perhaps to enhance the effect, he wore grey flannels and a white shirt. He directed her into the gallery and attended to the locks. There were varying clicks and she watched as he slid the chain. His sleeves were rolled to the elbow, and the arms, like the rest of him, were slim: but all delicacy ended at the wrist. The hands were abnormally large; almost ugly in their thickness. He turned and walked silently toward her in thin Italian leather slippers. He was still wearing the plain gold band on the fourth finger of ~~his~~ left hand. A still, heavy demeanour, as the still, heavy day. Basil reminded her of a nun.

He took a position beside a black marble sculpture. The stone had been worked into three slender appendages forcing upward to a height of ten or twelve feet: tentacles of a sea anemone, reaching. He looked very nice standing there, a composition in grey, white and black, against Cosimo's much beloved white walls and floors. Chloe could appreciate the theatricality of it. She, in a flowing red cape, was stationed just to the left of a massive canvas by one of her cousin's protégés, an encaustic work splashed

with crimson, yellow and black. Pure Italian Vogue, she. The cloak unhooked at the neck and she tossed it over the shoulders of a headless torso. Through the thick walls came the muffled rumble of thunder. Basil raised his black, black eyes to hers.

"Where are your bags?" After fourteen years he would still ask. They were at the Algonquin, they were at the Stanhope, they were at the Pierre, they were at Sebastian's. They were not on the stoop waiting for Basil to carry them in.

"At Sébastian's." She swept a loose strand of hair from her forehead, and straightened her dress. It was red too. Sebastian was constantly presenting her with red clothing: hats, shoes, stockings, undergarments. It verged on the fetishistic. He insisted it was her trademark, like Liszt's gloves.

Basil pulled a hankkerchief from his pocket and rubbed a greasy smudge from the glossy marble. There was something irresistibly caressable about polished stone. It invited touch, but today was Monday and the gallery was closed. No grubby little fingers today. The muscle of Basil's jaw was more pronounced than it had been when she had last seen him, five months ago.

"How is he?" She asked.

"Not so good. He's sleeping now. We hear you knocked them dead in Tokyo." His eyes were unreadable, but she sensed accusation in his voice and felt a need to apologise.

She raised her hand to her mouth and sat on a vacant pedestal. Her thumbnail tore away easily.

"Sebastian frothed them into a Chloe Cult. Posters and everything. I couldn't walk unmolested through the hotel lobby."

"And they held you over." He ran his big ugly hand up one of the marble pseudopods.

"Sebastian had committed me before I knew of the extension, I tried to get out of it." My God. She was sounding like a penitant. She didn't have to explain to Basil. "Did Sebastian deliver the books, by the way?" She had thought that the three volume portfolio of erotic engravings would be a potential source of amusement for her cousin.

"Yes. He came by one evening a few weeks ago, when Adam was here. Cosimo was very disappointed you weren't back."

"Adam was here?"

"He stayed a week." Basil pointedly stated as she groped in her bag for cigarettes.

"Smoke?" She held the pack up.

"I don't smoke."

"Oh yes. I forgot. Then I suppose it's useless to ask you for a match?"

He reached into his pocket and handed her a thin gold lighter. "Cosimo smokes."

"The perfect escort." The word 'trick' swelled in her mouth, but she swallowed it. She lit the cigarette and

threw the Piaget lighter back. That must have set Cosimo back a pretty penny. It hit one of the black marble arms and clattered to the floor before he could catch it. A chip of stone fell with it. He picked both up and cradled them in his palm. His jaw muscle twitched.

"You can wait upstairs until he wakes." The lighter went back into the pocket and his fingers closed over the fragment.

"Go ahead. I'll be up in a minute."

A thin movement of air dispersed her smoke as he moved to the elevator.

"Try and be quiet." He added unnecessarily. He didn't trust her either. The door slipped shut. The machinery whined. Chloe stretched her leg and pointed the toe of her elegant kid shoe at the name plate on the base of the sculpture. 'THE THREE GRACES-BASIL JAROS'

The upstairs sitting room was largely unchanged. Only the piano was missing. May twenty-fourth, crisply laundered white cotton slipcovers went on with clockwork regularity. She remembered that as a child, she hadn't been permitted to wear white shoes or dresses before that date... or little white cotton gloves. The persistence of convention. Smitty pushed open the door with one hand, a tea tray balanced on the other. Chloe stood, took the tray, and lay it on the coffee table. Smitty straightened her apron, straightened a cushion, and straightened a picture.

"Smitty, you're looking well." Chloe spoke slowly and enunciated her words. Smitty was eighty and slightly deaf. Other than that, she wore her years lightly and padded about with steady efficiency, maintaining the white rubber floors with the same careful consideration she'd applied to the former oak ones; feather dusting the inscrutable sculptures that could mean so much less to her than Grandmother's mahogany furniture.

"Me? Oh, I'm humming away. Someday I'll drop into a little pile of dust and someone can sweep me for a change. Drink your tea before it gets cold. I didn't know if you'd want butter, so it's there on the side." She indicated two pats, carefully molded into the shape of shells, and Chloe nodded in recognition at the effort.

"Thank you. That's very thoughtful."

"Always ate like a bird; you did." She flitted out and closed the door behind her.

Chloe perused the contents of the tray. Back bacon, two eggs sunny side up, English muffins, orange juice... she tasted this. It was freshly squeezed. And tea. No bag in a mug here. An exquisite silver set, hand crafted, art nouveau, graced one side of the tray. She had never seen it before. Smitty probably salvaged it from an upper shelf and a wad of pacific cloth. The tiny pot would hold only two cups. It evoked breakfast in bed. There was also a single rose, and a Times. Her stomach gnawed. A nearby thunderclap rolled

for five seconds after the lightning flashed, but still no rain. The last leg of the flight to Kennedy had been turbulent. The storm, brewing for hours, wouldn't break. Chloe poured some tea, added cream and sugar, and saw that the leaves of the tree outside the window were blowing upwards. The pale green undersides shuddered. Any time now, but the inevitability didn't lull the anticipation of the wait.

Cosimo had never replaced the piano. In its stead was a glass-topped desk neatly piled with folders, and on either side of the fireplace were the components of a state of the art sound system. Laser technology. There was also a more conventional turntable, and tens of feet of wall space devoted to every category of music in tape, disc, and mini-disc. Chloe lit a cigarette to accompany the tea, and alternated, smoking, sipping and crumpet munching. One had to do something and it beat pacing. The portrait of Grandmother was still over the mantle, but in the corner, snuggled behind a mirrored screen and a tree-sized palm was a computer. She remembered one year they'd come for Christmas, and Andrew and Basil had spent most of the time programming and inventing video games, while she and Adam and Cosimo had run around town attending parties. He'd been here. She missed him by two lousy weeks. If she hadn't agreed to extend the tour... what? What was there after two years? He wrote that he was getting married. Over a year ago. She concentrated on eating the eggs, which she hated, then poked through the papers on the desk. Applications for grants. The top folder contained

a resumé and a photograph of a painting; figurative, photo-realistic, of a small boy on a pony, on a beach. Waves lapped over the pony's hooves and the boy was grinning an unpleasant grin. She shut the folder.

A liquid dusk flooded the room. Couch and chairs floated in the gloom as though the faint illumination came from them alone. Chloe sat at the window and propped her bare feet against the shutter. Then it rained, falling straight down, pounding the roof, spearing the street. Drains couldn't accommodate the sudden deluge and the overflow washed the curb. Drops affused the panes. She felt oddly exhilarated. The portrait of Grandmother, revealed in a lightning glare, receded, smiling, as the unnatural twilight rushed back. She leaned on the cushions and closed her eyes as the glass clouded from the warmth of her skin. The drumming rain rang like an ovation.

"He's awake. He wants to see you." Basil stood beside her, and noticing an unlit cigarette in her hand, took out his lighter, holding the flame midway between them. Chloe placed the cigarette in her mouth and guided it to the orange glow. He continued to hold it there, a steady light reflected off his shirt, on her face, and she assumed he was staring at her until she found him, mirrored in the glass, just gazing at the rain. She extinguished the flame, and he turned and walked to his desk.

"Should I just go in?"

His labourer's hands stretched across the glass, tentatively reaching for the stack of folders. He appeared not to hear.

"Basil?"

"What? Oh yes... go in. He's waiting." He opened the top folder and touched the photograph of the boy on the pony as she slipped out.

"Cos...?" Chloe whispered and closed the door gently. Rain sloshed on the screen. The room brimmed with white noise. Cosimo lay on top of the covers in pyjamas and dressing gown snoring softly from the slack mouth. She scarcely recognized him as the man she had left six months ago. He had lost most of his hair, and what was left had been artfully arranged to frame his face. Grandmother's silver brushes glimmered beside bottles and papers on the night table. Her itinerary was at the top of the pile. Nov. 15th-Belfast, Nov. 17th-Dublin, Nov. 20th-Glasgow. It was the first Christmas in eighteen years they'd spent apart. She folded the paper between some magazines and curled into the slipper chair beside the bed. A book lay on the floor at its feet. Andrew Lang's Yellow Fairy Book. Cosimo turned in his sleep and moaned. His cheek, where it had touched the pillow, was violently red. There was no flesh left on his face. Long intervals succeeded each fall of his chest and she waited, held her own breath, until air was forcefully sucked in again, and the familiar blue silk robe showed movement. There

was a foreign newspaper at the foot of the bed. Her own photograph leapt out from a confusion of Japanese characters: under it, a scrapbook. She picked it up and flipped through. What few cuttings and photographs there had been from the tour were there, neatly taped and labelled, and all her letters.

'Dec. 25th, Dear Cos, It doesn't seem like Christmas without you. Sebastian left three days free, and we're in the mountains near Cortina. All I've done is watch him ski from a balcony, and drink cinnamon coffee. Can I get you anything in Italy? A Borsalino? Dove grey to match your eyes.'

The light banter continued. It pained her to be confronted with her own shallowness.

The wind blew a spray through the screen. Chloe put the book down and lowered the window. The sash slipped from her hands and banged the sill. She glanced at Cosimo. The lids fluttered open, but dropped again, a complicated network of blue veins under the translucent skin. Watching him sleep, she thought of the time they hooked up in Venice.

Basil had been checking out quarries in the north, and Adam, in Milan, doing whatever. They had taken a room in a sleazy little albergo directly across a canal from the daily newspaper, and the presses had kept them awake all night. They had pretended to be married. What had been going on that rooms were so scarce? The Bienalle? At the Teatro La Fenice, they could only buy standing-room tickets, but found a closed-up window nook, and had sat, scrunched up,

swigging Strega, listening to Beethoven, getting plastered in the dark. Then the power failed. Cosimo pulled her by the hand down the black stairs and around to the front door of the theatre. They sneaked into the parterre as attendants lit candles. Candlelight, Scarlatti, and gilded putti.

It all came back to her. After, they had taken a gondola ride. It was ninety degrees, humid, and the place stank. Fortunately, the gondolier didn't understand too much English, as they sang, roaring drunk:

'Doesn't Venice have allure?

Just a town without a sewer.'

The poor man probably wanted to go home to bed, but Cosimo wouldn't hear of going back to that hopeless little room and the crash of the all night presses; the clanking and the banging and the rolling. He tossed lire at the feet of the gondolier: piles of lire, thousands and thousands of lire, until there was a mound at the other end of the boat, and they drifted back and forth across the Laguna Morta all night, breathing in the fresh, cool Adriatic breeze as they slept in each other's arms.

They stumbled home through back alleys as shutters rumbled up, and paused to watch a glass blower. He took a break from fashioning leaves for a chandelier, and worked a little horse from the molten glass, just for fun. It turned out naive, primitive, and utterly charming. He presented it to Chloe with a bow, and she had carried it through Europe

wrapped in underwear. She still had it.

She looked at the scrapbook again. Why had he saved her letters? So superficial. So trite.

'Sebastian just slid off the mountain and he'll want attention. Berlin tomorrow. I know you love it, but I suspect, like Isherwood, you enjoyed the boys. Well, I hear the zoo is fine. I'll send you a boy, or a monkey. Which would you prefer?' Regards to Basil.

"Clo?" Cosimo tried to lift himself off the pillows, and the bed heaved under him. It was a waterbed. To prevent bedsores? Chloe shut the book and stood, slipping her arm around his back. The spinal vertebrae pressed through the meagre silk. She plumped the loose down and eased him into a semi-reclining position.

"How do you like my bed? Now I have to worry about seasickness, as if I didn't have enough to handle already. Basil's idea. Actually, it's a vast improvement on the orthopaedic firm support horror I had before. You're looking tolerably well. A little bagged about the eyes." He stopped. The rapid-fire monologue seemed to tire him.

"Haven't slept in forty-eight hours. I didn't stop over in Los Angeles."

"You should have. You look awful."

"You just said I looked tolerably well."

"I lied."

"Can I get you anything?"

He rubbed the red spot on his cheek. "One of your smelly French cigarettes." He grimaced as he bent his leg and she helped him arrange a cushion under his knee.

"Should you smoke?"

"I have bone cancer, not lung cancer, and what the Hell difference does it make anyway?" He snapped. It was startling. She gave him a Gitaine, and he had to steady one trembling hand with the other as she held the match. The smoke hung, a cloudy pool in the stagnant air. He let the cigarette dangle from his lips and lay his arms by his side.

"So you're a hit in the land of the micro-mini circuit." He mumbled. Chloe raised the window and leaned forward on the sill, allowing the fine mist from the rain pelting the screen, to shower her face and arms. She took several deep breaths then returned to the chair.

"I'm sorry I couldn't have been here sooner."

"Lord, why? I would've adored Japan. What a kick, walking through a mass of bouncing little black heads." His head dropped back and ash trickled down a lapel leaving a powdery trail. "No need to hurry back on my account. I'm not going anywhere... yet. Pour me some grape juice, will you, hon? In the thermos. I have become addicted to Welch's grape. The cute little cup with the spout. Basil found it. Thou shalt not dribble."

Chloe cleared some of the papers and moved the chrome thermos with the obsidian stopper to the bedside. The interior of the cup was stained purple.

"I suggested that we hook it to an I.V. pole, drain a few saline bottles, fill them with juice, and I could stick the tube in my parched little orifice whenever the spirit moved me, just letting the violet delight drip drip drip."

She held the cup as he sipped, then replaced the cigarette. His knees swelled beneath the pyjamas.

"...But he pointed out with his insidious practicality, that since I was forever falling asleep, I would either drown in grape juice, as I see it an absolutely better way to die than how I'm going about it, or that the tube would slip out of my mouth and the mattress would be ruined. This was before this nautical crib. I couldn't bring myself to point out to him that the mattress was ruined years before I ever brought him home. I hate to disillusion him. He's so sweet. Isn't he sweet?"

Chloe nodded. Cosimo knew perfectly well what she thought of Basil.

"He really admires you, you know. Personally, I can't abide that shit you play. It's all noise to me, but Basil loves it. I won't let him play it in the house without headphones, so he listens in the garage while he works. It does go so well with smashing and hammering." He giggled and the cigarette dropped from his lips. Chloe grabbed it before it could burn the sheet, and butted it in the ashtray. Cosimo was still laughing.

"Do you know he actually hums that stuff?" Tears squeezed from the corners of his eyes and dispersed in the

fan of lines. "Can you imagine anyone humming Takemitsu? Fuck! That hurts. Stop laughing Cosimo, or you'll break another rib." He touched his hand to his side. "Did you know that the opposite of esoteric was exoteric?"

Chloe shook her head.

"No? Neither did I until Basil threw it at me one day. He was showing me photographs by this young artist from Alaska. God, were they ugly. Social realist crap. He wanted funding for a year to crawl through the sewers of America or something. More grape juice. Thanks. Anyway, I thought the stuff was lousy and said so, and reminded him that the foundation didn't deal with photographers, and Basil accused me of having exoteric taste. I had to look it up. Later, I accused him of being exoteric too, since obviously, I had a taste for him, and you know what that bugger did? He invited ten of my nearest and dearest and former amis, and booked them toe to toe to file into my sickroom for an entire afternoon. Half an hour each, from twelve to five. For the first few hours, I had a great time, but by two thirty I was anxious to throw myself down the elevator shaft. All they talked about were rents, clothes, diets and exercise. They wouldn't even let me smoke in my own Goddamned room. They'd all given up. They wouldn't even let me talk about my cancer. I love talking about my cancer. Before, they used to bore me to tears with how everything you could eat, breathe, or do was carcinogenic, and now, golly, I have it, the big 'C', multiple myeloma, king of cancers, and the creeps wouldn't let me get a word in edgewise."

The rain had subsided somewhat, and thunder rumbled distantly. Birds, taking advantage of the lull, splashed in the gutters. Cosimo had a grey palour, and she was afraid the exertion was too much for him. His breathing was too rapid.

"Did I ever tell you about my childhood?" he asked.

"Only that you weren't happy. And the running away from schools, and Grandmother."

He appeared to have fallen asleep. She was about to creep out when he continued speaking.

"I was miserable. I used to hurt myself. I mean, really do damage. When I was seven or eight, I fell and broke my arm, and suddenly, I was the centre of the universe. Candy, games, comics; but it all stopped when the cast came off. So a while later, I 'slipped' in the bathtub and concussed myself. That was good for a week. The following month, the knife slipped out of my control as I was carving a piece of wood, and severed my femoral artery. I didn't know about arteries then. Messy, messy. Father twisted a tourniquet on and rushed me to the hospital. By this time my folks were getting the third degree at emergency. A social worker was called in, so I cooled it for a few months. Then the window. You know, every home has one; the window that's been broken for twenty years and no one bothers to fix it because you can just as easily prop it up with a ruler? Well, it 'fell' and broke my left arm. That was my final foray into the thrill of self-mutilation. It nearly destroyed the nerve and I

came that close to losing my arm. I was so careful after that, I never even had a real accident. For years, the parents referred to that period as 'the year Cosimo had all those accidents.' Like the year of the flood, or the year of the hurricane. I never told anyone." He clicked his tongue. "That was the best year, until the loss of my innocence... then they were all pretty good. I planned to be perennially healthy then get flattened by a passing truck at ninety. Granny lived to eighty-five." He sighed. "So, all my so-called friends came, and I really wanted to discuss my illness. I love talking about my disease. Even the word; disease. Try and say it without a grimace. Disease. I revel in every single gruesome detail of my treatments. But would they listen? No. And none of the bums even brought me any diverting drugs. Chocolate... fruit baskets... books... the stupid farts. What do I need with that crap? I need heroin, morphine, a little cannabis to counteract the effects of the chemo. I mean, that would have made a decent gesture. Another smoke, sweetheart. I don't suppose you smuggled in any lovely heroin from the far east? Alas. I fear not."

It was odd watching Cosimo perform a monologue without his customary animation. He lay stock still as his fingers occasionally twitched and plucked lightly at the white piping of his robe. It was a compulsive, nervous action. Chloe moved to the edge of the bed and held his cigarette. He winced as the rolling motion of the water jarred his position.

"I didn't think so. You confine your beastly activities to the legal if not strictly just."

She jerked the cigarette away in mock annoyance.

"I don't have to stay and listen to this."

"Yes you do. It's one of the unsung benefits of terminal illness. People have to put up with you. You can say any rotten thing that pops into your head and be assured of forgiveness. The whole world's read Kubler-Ross. It's tremendously liberating."

"What's the difference? You were never the soul of tact." She let him take a drag then finished off the cigarette herself.

"But you forgive me anyway."

"Yes."

He smiled triumphantly.

"...But not because you're dying," she added.

"Aw. Then why?"

"Because over the last twenty-eight years, you've chalked up a few credits. Like every year on my birthday, when you and Granny visited me at camp. My parents were always away, and you'd come up with French flags, and pasteries packed in ice, and fireworks, and we'd celebrate Bastille Day as my day, and you were so handsome, and Granny so splendidly eccentric in her crazy get ups. You made me feel special and everyone envied me. That's good for about a million insults."

"Hell. I don't have a million insults."

"Those were my happiest times."

"Aren't you happy now? With your success?"

"It's not anything like I thought it would be. Nothing like it at all." She carefully rose from the bed. "Then there was the time you said that Laurence and I made a cute couple. Negative credit. Deduct about fifty-thousand."

"I was being sarcastic. Besides, it was your wedding day. I couldn't very well say you were making the goof of your life."

"Why not? I still have five unpleasant scenes with him a year. He treats Andrew like shit. Oh well. Something good came out of it. Andrew is... he's, well, kind of like me."

He grunted. "You are a peculiar woman. I'm tired. I want to sleep now. Read to me." The breathing was laboured and he smiled apologetically as she tucked the covers around him. She picked up the fairy tales. The book was marked at 'The Glass Mountain.' She squinted in the grey light and began to read:

Once upon a time, there was a glass mountain at the top of which stood a castle made of pure gold, and in front of the castle there grew an apple tree on which there were golden apples.

Anyone who picked an apple gained admittance into the golden castle, and there in a silver room sat an enchanted princess of surpassing fairness and beauty. She was rich too, as she was beautiful, for the cellars of the castle were full of precious stones, and great chests of finest gold stood round the walls of all the rooms.

Cosimo sighed. "When I was a little boy, I had terrible leg pains. My mother would give me aspirin and read to me. I would lie quietly and feel the pain drain out my feet.

'Many knights had come from afar to try their luck, but it was in vain they attempted to climb the mountain. In spite of having their horses shod with sharp nails, no one managed to get more than half way up, then they all fell back down to the bottom of the steep, slippery hill. Sometimes they broke an arm, sometimes a leg, and many a brave knight had broken his neck, even.'

"Is this me Cos'. Am I like that?" She touched his hand but he merely grumbled in the nether region between waking and sleep, clutching at the embroidered edge of the sheet. The gold ring, mate to Basil's, had been taped with adhesive so it wouldn't slip off his finger. He lingered in the transitional state for two pages, then his jaw fell slack. The erratic guttural breathing resumed. She closed the book and kissed him on the forehead. Water sloshed gently as she leaned on the bed.

"Sebastian called. He wants you to call back." Basil in overalls, had a kerchief over his nose and mouth. Although the garage door was open, a fine dust thickened the air. Chloe backed against the grimy brick, inches from the sheet of rain: the dank refuge of a cave in the dark noon, so dark even the streetlamps were blazing. Couldn't Sebastian leave her alone for a day? An hour? Everything was urgent with him. Oh God. All she wanted to do was curl up in the dark—lock doors behind her—dream all this away. She dug her fingers into the crumbling masonry between the bricks.

"Smitty is sitting with him. He's asleep."

"He sleeps most of the time. Just as well. He's in a lot of pain." The piece he was working on was a pure white Carrara marble. It smelled like Italy. Perched on a ladder, he chiselled chunks from the upper surface. It was yet formless. Her shoulders were soaked through, and water squelched in the black kid shoes. She shivered. In the corner were disassembled elements of Cosimo's work: raw slabs of metal, rusting. One work, a mobile, hung suspended from the ceiling, and every so often, the shapes would collide with a resonant clang. It appeared to have been recently cleaned. Basil balanced the mallet and chisel in a groove in the stone and yanked down the kerchief.

"What can I do for you?" A flat matter-of-fact question. The enormous hands were softened with pale dust.

"Nothing. I just... just..."

"...had to get out of the house." He descended the ladder and took a gulp from a beer that had been sitting on an uncut block of stone. The same marble. Either a phase or bulk discount.

"Ya. I had to get out of the house." she confessed. "But I want to stay."

He nodded.

"Has he been this way for long?"

"About a month. He stopped the chemotherapy. It wasn't doing any good."

"But the doctor's said he had a few years," she protested.

"They were wrong. It was caught too late, and he just didn't respond to treatment. You know doctors. They wanted to bombard him with it all anyway. It wasn't helping. He was a guinea pig." Bitterness infused the speech. "He still gets blood. I convinced him to stick with that, at least, by convincing him that otherwise he'd get so anaemic his brain cells would start dying off on him. He's afraid of that. After the transfusions he feels quite 'perky', as he puts it." Basil finished the beer and shoved the can in a box filled with other cans. "He had one last week, and that night he had me take him to this club uptown. All the kids were break-dancing. I was a wreck the whole time. His bones'll break if you breathe on them. He had three cracked ribs from rolling over in bed. We had to walk across the dance floor to reach our table. He lasted twenty minutes." He rubbed his temple leaving a white smudge along the hairline, like a scar. Then he pulled the mask up and quickly mounted the ladder. She had been dismissed. He slammed the mallet down on the chisel and a large block separated from the main body of stone, shattering on the cement.

Chloe stepped through the curtain of rain, unlatched the garden door, and sat on the peeling wooden bench under the lilac tree. Cosimo's sculpture still sat in the midst of the perennial lavender, shining wet, and the drops fell so heavily, she couldn't tell if she was crying or not.

"Miss Chloe, why don't you lie down for a bit?"

"It's alright, Smitty. I'm not tired." Chloe arranged a branch of seedless grapes in a pineapple slice and pressed a cherry onto a scoop of cottage cheese.

"Well you look tired." The old woman flicked a creamy linen place mat and smoothed it onto the bed-tray. The napkin was folded into a crown. Jun could do it. Smitty could do it, but no matter how she tried, all her endeavour wound up in a shapeless lump, and she had long ago resigned herself to the limit of flat, parochial rectangles. Smitty's pinafore apron stretched across her sagging bosom and hung shapelessly below the knee. Whispy grey hair was flattened under an invisible net. Shoes orthopaedic and stockings thick. A new Interview magazine was wedged in the side pocket of the tray. She replenished the thermos with fresh juice and whisked it all off to Cosimo. Chloe bent over the counter and closed her eyes. She wanted to go home and be babied by Jun. What did Sebastian want? She touched the dial of the phone, then changed her mind, cut a bunch of grapes, and sat on the floor. There wasn't room in this culinary closet for a stool. Not even an oven: only a microwave. When Cosimo remodelled the house he determined that he'd eat out every night and develop a rapport with the local catering firms. And he had. The kitchen, formerly a linen closet, was a tiny interior room with a skylight. At the moment, Chloe had the unpleasant sensation of drowning. Rain cascaded down the glass in waves. She crushed a grape in her teeth and waited for the kettle to boil. The sweet liquid squirted over her

tongue. Cosimo's terry bathrobe was warm. The bath had proved theraputic, but failed to cleanse the black stains from her feet. Her toes wiggled darkly from the hem of the robe. The elevator whirred and the door clicked open. The tell-tale step of thin leather soles.

"Comfy?" Basil stepped into the cubicle and removed the kettle plug. She forgot. Electric kettles do not screech. She didn't hear the bubbling over the sound of the rain.

"Sebastian called again."

"Oh."

"He's coming over." His hands were clenched into big fat fists, but the lean body bent reedlike with the inevitable.

"I don't want him here." She didn't like overlap in her life. Sebastian's Chloe was not Cosimo's Chloe. She drew the robe tighter and ate another grape. Sebastian's Chloe was a concoction of his rather quirky taste. She didn't have the energy to be what he expected. Not now. Not here.

"He'll be here at around two." What was he not asking? With one hand he poured steaming water into a small brown teapot, dumped it directly into the sink, measured two heaping teaspoons from the tea caddy, and again, filled it with water. The knuckles of the other hand remained white.

"I'll keep him downstairs." she said.

The fingers uncurled and his dark eyes caught hers for a milleseccond of unspoken understanding, then he turned and left her along in the murky half-light.

Chloe lowered the dress over her head. It was dry, but for the seams which clung damply. Her fingers poked automatically at the numbers on the desk phone, but there was no answer at Sebastian's. Eleven rings. She held the receiver away from her ear, then hung up. The house was silent except for the constant drumming of the rain. She crept into the hall. Cosimo's door was open a crack. She pushed it a few inches wider. Raspy breathing came from the bed. Beside her cousin, not touching but within a distance body heat could travel, was Basil. He raised his head and lifted his finger to his lips, the universal gesture of mothers over a sleeping child. They were both naked. She cringed at the contrast of the two bodies. If Basil was slim, then Cosimo was cadaverous. The joints bulged obscenely, bones draped in sagging grey skin. Basil lowered his head to the pillow. She carefully shut the door.

Her finger, red at the tip, remained pressed on the OPEN button. Sebastian hadn't seen her yet. He faced away as he examined a monumental bronze that poked through the well to the first floor. The lilac tree, jerked by the wind, slapped the plate glass. A rivulet wended over the slate floor from the sliding panel door, that in good weather opened directly onto the garden. The statues were bathed in the lurid glare of spotlights. He turned.

"Why didn't you wake me when you got in?"

No hello. No how are you? She stepped out quickly as the

door of the cab slid shut behind her. She grabbed the cold bronze leg of the statue. Why wasn't she wearing shoes or underwear? Why was her hair loose and falling down her back? Why was she wearing red? Like flapping a cape at a horny bull. His sensuality pulsed through the air.

"It was too early. And I wanted to see Cosimo first thing."

"Did you see him?" He flicked his sleeve back and glanced at his watch.

"Yes."

"Then let's go. I made an appointment with the designer for the new dresses."

"Then unmake it. I'm staying here."

"If we cancel, they won't be ready by the end of the week."

"I'll get the old ones cleaned. Service while you wait."

"I think you should wear a new one for this concert."

"Drop it, Sebastian. It doesn't matter to me if I wear my high school-prom formal. For God's sake. I just stepped off the plane seven hours ago. I'm not in the mood to stand on a stool for heaven knows how long, and have pins stuck in me. And I don't want to leave here."

"Okay. I'll reschedule your appointments for tomorrow."

"Appointments?"

"Hair at five and a dinner interview with a writer from People magazine."

"People? You've got to be kidding."

"Be grateful I was owed a favour. They weren't all that interested."

"Jesus, Sebastian."

"Chloe Delaney meets Middle America, who couldn't care less."

He pushed her hair aside and kissed her neck, sliding his hands down her back, fondling her buttocks, forcing her pelvis into his. Her dress inched up, his fingers cold against her skin. The damp wool of his suit made her thighs itch.

"No, Sebastian..."

"Yes." His kiss tasted of toothpaste, and his cheeks, smooth from a recent shave, were soft and cool from the rain. His beard grew so fast, he had to shave twice a day. She pushed him away and pulled her skirt down. He undid his vest buttons with clean, manicured nails. Everything about him was clean and manicured. He was one of the most clean men she'd ever met. She sat at the foot of the statue.

"Do you think we might, at least, turn out the lights?"

He shrugged.

"Sure. But there's nothing out there but a garden."

"And a house across the way."

Sebastian opened a panel on the wall and turned three switches. One by one, the rows of lights dimmed, and the room turned grey. The marbles, the bronzes, loomed in half-light, suddenly unsubstantial. He sank to the floor beside her, lifted the dress over her head, folded it into a pillow, and she shivered; the sensation of cold stone under her flesh like a plunge into a mountain lake. He methodically denuded himself, laying each article of clothing into a tidy

pile, reclining at her side. The hair on his chest, like his head, was flecked with silver. She squeezed his broad shoulders, his muscular arms; pressed against his torso, reassuring herself, intertwining their legs, rubbing his warm back, stealing his strength as it rose from within, smelling his firm, pink, soap-scented skin, blocking out the sickly odour of death. She wanted to fuck as much as he did. More.

"Sebastian, what do you think of children?"

"I don't."

"What about yours?" She watched from the floor as he buttoned up his shirt.

"I'm an absentee parent. I pay the bills. We have lunch occasionally. We are... civil to one another."

"What if I had a baby?"

His hands froze on the last button, the collar button. He always buttoned from bottom to top.

"You're not pregnant, are you?"

"And if I was?"

"I'd tell you to get rid of it."

"Why?"

"Well you'd hardly qualify for mother of the year. What do you want with another kid?"

"That's not true. I love Andrew. He's coming to my concert."

"Does all this have something to do with Adam?"

"Adam? What would it have to do with Adam?"

"You were always pretty competitive with him."

"Competitive? What are you talking about?"

"Now that Adam has a baby."

"Adam has a baby?"

"You didn't know?"

"A baby?"

"If you didn't know, what's all the sudden interest in procreation?"

"There's no interest. Forget it."

"Then you're not...?"

"No."

"Good. Get off the floor. You'll catch cold."

Sometimes she wished Cosimo wasn't so damn protective. What did he think she'd do if he'd told her about Adam's baby? Well, there was no point making an issue of it. Cosimo was propped in a chair near the window, overlooking the trees on the street, pillows padding where body fat ought to have been, clean pyjamas, grape juice balanced on the chair arm. Demerol had dulled the pain, for the moment. He smiled up at her as she entered the room. No. She wouldn't bring it up.

"You know what bugs me the most about dying?" he asked.

"What?"

"Knowing that there are certain things I'll never know. Things that are ambiguous." He fiddled with the tassel on his sash. "Like... do you remember the old song... it was

probably before your time... it went... 'Sweetest little fellow, everybody knows, don't know what to call him but he's mighty like a rose.'"

"I remember."

"Well, can you tell me, is it meant to mean mighty, as in powerful in its purity... or mighty like... as a Southern idiom... awfully like... rather like?" He frowned.

"Sorry. I have no idea."

"I always figured all these things would be explained some day, and now it appears I'll die without ever knowing. Have you any idea how many boring little confusions and ambiguities there are? Every day, you stub your toe on them, pick them up and toss them over your shoulder with a shrug expecting elucidation tomorrow, or the day after, or next year. Then one day, they give you a year to live, and there they sit, a slag heap of questions shedding a penumbral obscurity over all the clarity and distinction you seek. I sleep, but I don't rest." A cold sweat dotted his brow. He avoided eye contact. It was unlike him.

"Is there anything you want to ask me?" The silk tassel danced with his fingers in a small hurricane of frenzy.

"I can't think of anything."

"Are you sure? I don't know how much longer I'll be lucid."

She shook her head.

"By the way...it's in my will, but I'm leaving all the family stuff to you and Andy: jewelry, paintings, all the junk in the attic. I want you to go up there now and go through

the trunks and boxes. Basil's arranged for movers to crate and deliver it to Montreal. They're coming tomorrow."

"What about Basil?"

"As of six months ago, he officially took over the administration of the foundation. He's been running things for years anyway. I never had a head for business... and I'm leaving him my personal holdings. If it hadn't been for his investment acumen, I wouldn't have had any anyway."

"You don't have to explain. I think I've been unfair to Basil. But shouldn't Grandmother's portrait stay here? The foundation was her idea."

"I want you to have it. Please. Now go through that stuff."

"What's the rush?"

"Just do what I say. Please. I need to lie down. Call Basil."

"I'll help you..."

"Call Basil." He was agitated. His hand twitched uncontrollably. He still refused to look her in the eye... She picked up the house phone and buzzed the garage.

Chloe had always believed that the door at the end of the hall was a closet, but a narrow flight of brown linoleum stairs faded into the dark. She touched the light switch and a bare bulb revealed yellow walls and a wooden handrail. As she climbed, a dry musty smell filled her nose. She entered through an open trap. The rumbling on the roof was noticeably

louder here. A dingy light hung about two grimy, circular windows, one at either end of a space that was defined in its irregularity by chimneys and skylight wells. The ceiling was low; six feet, and she wondered that she had never before realised the attic's existence as she brushed a cobweb from between a mannikin and the brick wall.

A string swung from a hanging bulb in the centre of the room. Lit, it wore a halo of gossamer strands. A spider scurried along the beam from which it was suspended. Steamer and storage trunks lined one wall. Chloe licked a finger and wiped the dust from one of the stickers. The Mauritania. Fifty years, and the colours shone. Grandmother didn't appear to favour any particular line. All were represented: The Olympic, Imperator, Aquitania, Normandie, The Empress of Britain. One of the steamer trunks had been pulled, and was standing on its end in the centre of the floor, under the light. The latches were open. Hangers rattled as she pulled it apart; bugle-beads trembled and glistened, satin shimmered. One dress slid to the floor with the sound of waves hitting a shingly beach. She lifted it to her shoulders and measured the cloudy image in a silvery mirror propped against the far wall. In the drawers were stockings and undergarments trimmed with lace, faintly scented, tomb air. There were rhinestone shoe buckles... 'Not rhinestones, dear, brilliants... brilliants.' Grandmother would say. An ivory toilet set; brushes, comb, mirror, buttonhook... why on earth did she still carry the buttonhook? And powder boxes,

all monogrammes. C.O.M.. Chlotilda O'Brian... but what was her middle name? She'd have to ask Cosimo. Strands of black hair were emeshed in the brush bristles. She drew one out; long, like her own. A perfume bottle. The cork disintegrated as she twisted it. A cloying floral fragrance lingered in the amber stain at the bottom of the vial.

The two lower drawers were labelled: photographs, documents, papers. Inside the upper of the two, tightly wedged, were a series of leather-bound volumes... diaries. She eased one out. Five years. 1910-1915. A chair with a fractured ladderback hung from a nail on the wall. She lifted it down, sat beside the trunk, and opened the book. Spidery copperplate handwriting in faded blue ink filled the pages. She knew the hand from Grandmother's letters. There were nine volumes in all. Forty-five years. She put it back. They would stay beside her bed and she would finally be able to put together the pieces of Granny's life.

The next drawer held photos and papers. A portrait in a blackened silver frame sat on top. It was also monogrammed: M.V.J... The young officer had dark eyes and a tender mouth. An inscription was blazoned across the insignia of rank. 'Plus que hier—moins que demain'. Chloe smiled. Was no one immune to the germ of passion? Even the oldest and tritest sentiments would convey private messages. 'M'. Maurice? Michel? Her grand amour, for whom she abandoned family and friends, position and respect? Who sucked in phosgene gas and still, she loved. A smaller picture; Grandmother in

a nurse's uniform standing behind 'M' who is slumped in a wheelchair. A beautiful garden stretches behind them to a Château. A hospital? There are other patients, other nurses in the distance. More pictures: her father and Uncle Brian in short pants, long pants, tentative moustaches, wedding pictures. This twin was not her father, because the woman with him was not her mother. Chloe lit a cigarette with matches she'd snatched from Cosimp's night table. She was his mother. Alice. Camera-shy. Leaning on Uncle Brian's arm. A tinted picture, next, of Alice holding a chubby baby, who in turn was holding a bunny with pink ears. Cosimo. She paused over one of her own father and beautiful mother leaning on a ship's rail, mother's sable dangling over the name on the life ring. They weren't touching. She remembered them as having been very correct in their relations, even with each other. Very formal. She had never been able to figure them out.

Chloe placed the picture aside to find another of Cosimo as a babe in arms. No. Wait. Alice is much older in this one. Her face is lined, the hair, thin and limp. All worn out. Too old for a pregnancy, but there was the baby: little pouty mouth and shock of dark hair. Newborn. The next photo was identical except that Cosimo is sitting beside his mother on the bed. The baby clutches his finger. When was it taken? Chloe turned it over, but the back was blank; no conscientious pencil scribbles with date, place, and personnel. She examined it again. Alice wasn't smiling.

Neither was Cosimo. Was the baby sick? Did it die? It must have died. Cosimo was an only child. She rifled through the pile, but there were no more pictures of Alice or the mysterious baby.

Chloe lay the photographs on the floor and flipped through the papers. One file case contained certificates: birth, marriage, death, vaccination! Grandmother's death... 1967, Alice Delaney... August, 1947, Brian Delaney... February, 1947. She picked up the last photograph again. How old was Cosimo? The solemn face gave nothing away. He could be fourteen or twenty. Or twenty. It could be 1947. He was wearing a sport shirt and light pants. It could be July, 1947. He's tanned; black against his mother's pallor. It was July, 1947, and Cosimo's mother had died after giving birth. Chloe took a final drag on the cigarette and ground the butt into the dusty floorboards. Alice had died, but the baby had lived, and grown to be the image of her Grandmother.

She lit another cigarette and let a lazy plume waft out her nose. It drifted up and around the bare bulb. Why hadn't she seen it before? How many times had the resemblance been pointed out to her? How many times had she pretended to herself that she had Delaney blood? She lifted the photographs back onto her lap and let the cigarette hang from her mouth as she went through them again, concentrating on the portraits of Granny; at eighteen, gowned in white for the debutante's ball; at twenty in her wedding gown; a head and shoulders study with pearls; at thirty with two chubby babies; at

thirty-five with her French soldier. But for the clothes, the woman could have been her.

She looked around the room. Everything was where it ought to have been. There was nothing of the random disarray prevalent to most storage rooms. Cosimo had intended that she examine this trunk. Cosimo. An ash fell on the picture. Cosimo was her brother. Her brother. Why hadn't he told her? A pair of silver leather dance slippers rested on the floor of the wardrobe side of the trunk. She slid them on and tapped the floor, thinking, remembering; and all the times he had hinted, almost begged her to ask came rushing into her head. The day he had dressed her up in Granny's clothes, Granny's jewels, Granny's perfume, Granny's style of make-up. When in Venice, she had suggested that they register at the Hotel as husband and wife, and he had insisted it be as brother and sister. When she had married Laurence, and he had snarked that history was repeating itself, that she was making the same mistake as Granny... and she had never asked, never asked, never asked. No fantasy had ever been so obvious and yet she persisted with the fantasy rather than ask an unpalatable truth. But what had happened? How had she ended up with her parents, ...her aunt and uncle? It was clear they hadn't cared much for children. It would say in the diaries but she would ask Cosimo. This was what he wanted. It was his dying wish.

Chloe gazed in the mirror at her ghostly double, the pale face floating in the frame, the portrait of Grandmother. A bleak smile crossed her lips.

Basil had cleared the desk of work and was stirring a pitcher of martinis. The glass rod rang against the rim, pinched in his wrestler's grip; hands that so gently ministered to her cousin... her brother. He filled a glass and gave it to her as she entered the room, trailing cobwebs. He knew. Who else knew? Everybody but her? Did Sebastian know? Adam? Certainly, Smitty. She swallowed the drink and sank onto the couch. No excuse she could find for not asking could be quite good enough to explain away her blindness. The air was heavy with the scent of lilacs, freshly cut, raining onto the glass table. Basil kneeled beside her and rested his hand on her leg. She concentrated on it; the curly black hairs and bulging veins. Rain thrummed softly on the window. In the other room, Cosimo cried out in his sleep.

" 'He that has and a little tiny wit
With a hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
Must make content with his futures fit
Though the rain it raineth every day.' "

Cosimo relaxed visibly as Chloe sat beside him on the bed, taking his hand, and made no effort to raise himself. "The speaker will now entertain questions from the floor."

"Tell me." She kissed his fingertips. His speech was weak but clear.

"The problem was, Granny didn't get on with her boys. She'd built up an uneasy detente, at best. They had been

prettymuch poisoned against her by their father, but she tried. God, she tried. After father disowned me, I still managed to see mother. On the sly, of course. I loved her very much. She was sweet and gentle. Not like David's wife. She was a Barracuda."

"A walking endorsement for cosmetic surgery."

"An insatiable appetite for kinky sex."

"I didn't know that."

"I made it up."

"Although it wouldn't surprise me: She used to take trips without father... I mean Uncle David... that lasted for months. Lord, this is confusing. So Alice was pregnant with me."

"And father died."

"How?"

"Didn't I ever tell you? He fell off one of his great bronze horses... as he was touching up an ear." He tried not to giggle but couldn't help himself.

"You're kidding?"

"No, no. No, no. All perfectly true. It's unseemly to laugh uncontrollably when recounting your father's demise, so I rarely did." His lips were dry. Chloe fed him some juice. He continued.

"Alice was lost. I always thought she would have been better off without him, he was a bit of a brute, but she really loved him. She hung on until you were born, she was much too old to have a baby, then she faded away. They used to call it childbed fever. The anti-biotics didn't work. I tend to think

that she just didn't want to live without Brian.

"Why..." Chloe picked at the frayed fabric on the arm of the chair. "... why didn't you keep me?"

"I did. I even had you Christened. Didn't you find the certificate up there?"

"I was Christened in Montreal."

"Catholic?"

"United."

"You're Catholic. Check the records at St. Pat's. August Fifth."

"I don't understand."

"Shortly after, your so-called parents came back from Europe. At first, their offer to adopt you sounded like charity. They were very nice, and concerned... but when they saw I was determined to keep you, they... well, things got nasty. There was a custody battle. To the prejudiced eye, Gran and I had a Helluva lot of dirty linen in our collective closet. She abandoned her husband and small children, and I... well, homosexuals were not then to be trusted with the care, feeding and moral instruction of the young. Not even their very own sisters. The court issued a restraining order that we weren't to so much as hang around their town house to watch the nanny push you in your pram. We did anyway, so they moved to Montreal. We didn't see you for ten years. Then you turned up on our doorstep. Sending you back, when you were so obviously miserable, was one of the rottenest things I ever had to do." His eyes were closed and the voice had sunk to

a whisper. Chloe bent over, straining to hear.

"Whatever our lives have been, I could not have loved you more."

"Cosimo..."

The slow, regular breathing signaled his sleep. For another hour, Chloe stayed, holding his hand, until the breathing stopped.

Cosimo left precise instructions. After the coroner signed the death certificate, Basil prepared the body. No embalming. No coffin. No funeral. The mortician was offended, insisting that he had never heard of a shroud being used in New York. Chloe and Smitty found an old linen tablecloth of Granny's and they wrapped him themselves, standing face to face as they sewed the seams together. Basil cut a board, to lay him out, then they all three, tied bunches of lilac to blanket the corpse. A close friend of Cosimo's, a Jesuit, performed a private mass, the body was cremated, and the ashes scattered, before the announcement was printed in the Times.

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Chloe put the paperweight on the desk and leaned back in the chair, tired, throbbing, drained; the thing denied was finally admitted. The doctor lit her a cigarette which she took gratefully.

"I'm relieved... and I feel guilty that I am relieved."

"Why?"

"I've hurt too many people."

"Your friends seem very devoted."

"And not just that I've hurt them, but the effect on me. On me. I'm going back to my room now."

"We'll talk tomorrow. I'm very encouraged. You made real progress today." He stood and accompanied her to the door. As Chloe walked through the antiseptic hallways, the story she had been reading Cosimo crept into her thoughts. Was it a blind resignation to Fate that permitted the Princess to watch the brave knights tumble to the foot of the glass mountain? Did she suffer at the constant spectacle of death and dying? Why did princesses in fairy tales, always sit around, helpless? She could have warned them off, or thrown a rope from a parapet and climbed down. Was inevitability a justification?

Her door was open. A pair of long skinny legs with sandals, dangled over the foot of the bed. On the floor was a cardboard box. He sprang up and smiled when she entered the

room; Cosimo's smile... Cosimo's eyes... not Laurence's... even to the minute specks of amber. Andrew was momentarily surprised when Chloe threw her arms around his neck. His body stiffened for a second before he returned the embrace. He kissed her cheek and stooped to lift the box from the floor. There was an anxious look on his face.

"Happy birthday, Mum." He opened the flaps and took a scrawny plant from the carton. It was squat and single-stemmed. There were few leaves. She controlled an urge to laugh.

"It's a Bonzai tree. Jun's been helping me. I started it three years ago. He calls it the tree of life. In China, they used to start one when you were born, and when you were old enough, you took care of it yourself. You see... you pinch back the growth, and it becomes stunted. The boll gets all thick and gnarled. They can live hundreds of years."

Chloe touched the woody stem. He had carefully arranged moss over the earth in a shallow ceramic container.

"It's a cedar."

"You'll have to show me what to do. I have a black thumb."

"This is pretty hardy." He gripped the miniature trunk between his thumb and forefinger and cocked his head. The shaggy fringe of hair, bleached pale by the sun, fell into his eyes. "See how thick it's getting?"

She could see, the care and love that had been invested

in the cultivation of this tiny living thing. Laurence must have known what Andrew had planned. It would be just like him, to run out and buy the huge rubber tree after seeing this. She was glad she'd moved it out of the room.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"It's the most wonderful gift anyone's ever given me."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Really, really?" His eyes were full of hope and relief.

"Absolutely."

"Can I ask you something?"

"Certainly. Shoot."

"I just didn't know if.. well... you know...?"

"I'm fine. Sit down. Now what's on your mind?" She placed the tree on the bedside table and sat next to Andrew on the bed. He wiggled his toes as he talked.

"I've kind of made a decision."

"About what?"

"Well, I don't know if I'm allowed to make decisions."

"Tell me." Chloe held his hand between hers. He had been coming nearly every day with games and books. At first she hadn't known what to say to him, but gradually, over chess, cribbage and backgammon, conversation wove itself in, and she had discovered that Andrew was very much her sort of person. He avoided her gaze.

"I don't want to go to boarding school."

"Have you discussed this with Daddy?"

"He won't listen. He liked boarding school."

"Ya. I know." She patted his knee.

"I...Mummy?"

"Yes, Love?"

"I don't want to live with Daddy anymore."

The oscillating fan hummed and turned, hummed and turned.

"Do you want to live with me?" Chloe held her breath.

Not until this very moment did she realize this was what she wanted too — had wanted all along.

"Yes." he answered softly.

"Really?"

"Really."

She squeezed his hand, afraid he'd pull away. "Then — that's what you'll do."

"Will they let me?"

"We'll make them."

"Daddy'll fight us. Will what I want, count?"

"It does to me."

"What about your tours?"

"I don't know. There are tutors. We'll work something out."

"I don't want you running away to France."

"What?" He scrunched up his face.

"Did I ever tell you that Cosimo ran away from school seven times?"

"No." He appeared interested.

"After the seventh time, they gave up. He lived with my Granny after that."

"I'll keep it in mind." He said.

"And I'll keep you in train fare," she added. "If it comes to that."

"Did Cosimo really run away seven times?"

She ruffled his hair. "These are tales for long winter nights." Here was the continuity she wanted: Grandmother, her, Cosimo, Andrew. She was connected, bound, and it was right. Andrew sat, frozen, expectant. Chloe touched his shoulders and drew him toward her. He buried his face in her breast and just held her, quietly, unmoving. She kissed his soft, fine hair. She hadn't held him since he was tiny.

The dinner trolleys rattled in the hallway. Yes. This was right. She never imagined that holding Andrew would be her peace. From deep in the building came the mad laugh of Jane, taunting departing visitors, but also, faint and distinct on the wind from the mountain, the singing of the violin. She strained to hear.

This was right.

END